

And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction. The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And proclaim as you go, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay. Acquire no gold or silver or copper for your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics or sandals or a staff, for the laborer deserves his food. And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart. As you enter the house, greet it. And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town. Matthew 10:1-15

During World War II, a church building in Strasbourg, Germany was destroyed. After the bombing, the members of the church surveyed the area to see what damage had been done. They were pleased that a statue of Jesus Christ with outstretched hands was still standing, because it had been sculpted centuries before by a great artist. But in taking a closer look however, the people discovered both hands of Christ had been sheared off by a falling beam. It seemed like a great tragedy at the time. Yet, sometime later, when a sculptor in the town offered to replace the broken hands as a gift to the church, the church leaders refused. In seeing the statue that way for a length of time, they at some point came to realize the damage done to the statue of Jesus Christ actually symbolized a powerful teaching from Scripture – in that they were called to serve God with all their hearts, but *if they didn’t do their part, Christ had no hands*. They said that the statue reminded them that the work of Jesus Christ had been given to them.

This is the truth of God’s Word that we see in our text for today – in that in the chapters leading up to Matthew 10, Jesus had preached and taught the principles of the Kingdom of God, and then he had personally demonstrated the power of his authority as the sovereign God and King of the Kingdom of God, and today he delegates that same authority to his apostles to carry out his ministry into the world, which is the same work, the same authority, the same ministry that God calls us to in His church today.

As we step into Matthew 10 we find Jesus is in the final phase of His first Galilean ministry. He had established Capernaum as a home base for his ministry throughout the region - teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. He had taught them the meaning of the Hebrew Scriptures and pointed out the fulfillment of its prophecies concerning Messiah in himself. He had proclaimed the good news that the Kingdom of God/heaven was at hand, so they needed to repent and prepare for that Kingdom to come into their hearts and lives. Jesus had healed all manner of disease and sickness, demonstrated His authority over both the natural and the supernatural worlds through miracles and casting out of demons. Jesus had shown He has the authority of God in forgiving sins and he had even raised the dead.

But even then, the reaction of the people to Jesus’ teaching and miracles had been somewhat mixed. Most were amazed by the wisdom of his teaching and the power of his miracles - but not amazed enough to make any significant change in their lives. For the most part, they went back to their routine of life and remained indifferent to him. Others rejected Jesus and were aggressively antagonistic to his message and miracles. The religious leaders of the day particularly accused Jesus of being empowered by satan and his demons. But even then, in spite the apathy and attacks - some people did respond positively to Jesus’s teaching and miracles, and they believed Jesus’ message, and it changed their lives.

Jesus' response to the people also seemed mixed. He condemned the religious leaders for their blasphemy and he warned the people in general about their unbelief. At the same time, in spite of the apathy and the opposition, Jesus still ministered in the region of Galilee - teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every kind of disease and sickness. Two weeks ago we saw why Jesus did so in Matthew 9:36-37. *"When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.'"* Jesus's words here forced his disciples to see the bigger picture of the power and authority of his work; words which also challenged them to be involved in his Kingdom ministry, far beyond their personal abilities and physical limitations. Today we see the response Jesus wanted them to have, the reality of when we pray for the work of Christ, we will become personally involved.

And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction. The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. Matthew 10:1-4

Matthew tells us that Jesus *"called to him his twelve disciples."* This calling of these particular men by Jesus was not done haphazardly. In Luke 6:12-13 we read that before Jesus selected this group of men to be his disciples: *"he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles."* Because the harvest of lost souls was plentiful and the laborers to help harvest the mission field were few, Jesus called and commissioned these twelve men and empowered them in a supernatural way to be his co-workers in the harvest. They were already disciples of Jesus - they were already students of Jesus's teachings who followed him, so they could learn to be more like him. Jesus now gives them special abilities to minister among the people as *"apostles."* The word *"apostle"* specifically refers to someone sent with the authority of the sender - and so Jesus' apostles were anointed to carry the authority of Jesus. They would have the right and power to act upon Jesus' behalf. Jesus gives them authority over unclean spirits and demons, that they might cast them out. He also gives them authority to heal every kind of disease and sickness just exactly as Jesus had been doing throughout his ministry on earth.

One would expect that the men who were chosen by Jesus would have been extra-ordinary men - men of high standing, unmatched character, unquestionable integrity, strong and courageous. Jesus spent all night praying about them before he called and chose them, and so we would assume he would choose the cream of the crop, the best of the best, to be his apostles. Yet further scrutiny shows these men to nothing more than just ordinary. In fact, it does not take much to see they have an abundance of flaws and defects in their characters - and they often were seriously lacking in faith, courage, commitment, power, understanding and humility. Most churches would have passed over most of these men as potential leaders. Most of these men would not have passed the psychological profiles used by most ministry and missions organizations to determine who is qualified to serve - yet these are the kind of men that God used to, in the words of Acts 17:6: *"turned the world upside down."* The truth is, they fit quite well with the words in 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 regarding those whom God chooses: *"For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God."* God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies those whom He calls. God doesn't choose us by our abilities but by His abilities. John MacArthur once said: *"The greatness of God's grace is seen in His choosing the undeserving to be His people and the unqualified to do His work. It should be a marvelous encouragement to every believer to know that, just as Elijah, the apostles had a nature like ours."*

“Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother” Peter is the first apostle mentioned, which is appropriate because he was the foremost of the apostles and is mentioned more often throughout the New Testament than any other apostle. Peter was brash and bold in asking and answering questions while the others shied away. This characteristic led to both blessing and admonishment. Peter was also a man of action. He was always found in the middle of things and he was bold what he said and did. It was Simon Peter that rose to the Jesus’ defense in the garden when the soldiers came to arrest him. Peter also had a tendency to speak before thinking such as when he brashly proclaimed that he would stay with Jesus and was ready to die for him. Yet, by the next morning he had denied Jesus three times. Peter also had a bit of an impatient spirit in him. After his resurrection, Jesus told Peter and the other apostles to wait in Jerusalem, but Peter did not wait very long before deciding to return to fishing. But Jesus called and chose this bold, brash, boastful and impatient fisherman to follow him - and in his responding, Jesus turned him into Peter the Apostle, a fisher of men. Peter was the major spokesman who shared and spread the gospel throughout Jerusalem, then into Samaria, and then to the Gentiles. Tradition tells us that Peter died as a martyr after being forced to witness the crucifixion of his wife. He was then also crucified, but upside-down at his request because he felt unworthy to die as Jesus died.

“Andrew” was Simon Peter’s brother. Peter and Andrew were both originally fishermen from Bethsaida on the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee. Andrew had been a follower of John the Baptist and was he prepared for the coming of Messiah - so when John pointed out Jesus, Andrew became one of his very first disciples. The first thing Andrew did after meeting Jesus was to go get his brother Simon (Peter). Andrew was more reserved than Peter, though like Peter, he was inquisitive which is why he found Jesus first. Andrew, however, was not like Peter in that he would wait and ask his questions in private. Andrew lived out a simple faith in Jesus. When Jesus told the disciples to feed the thousands of people who had been following Jesus, Andrew who was the one simply found a boy with five barley loaves and two fish and brought them to Jesus. He didn’t know what Jesus would do, but he had seen Jesus’ miracles. Andrew’s life was characterized by humility, openness and lack of prejudice. He saw the need to bring the gospel to not only his fellow Jews, but to all of fallen mankind. He is the one that found some Gentiles who were inquiring about the Messiah and he brought them to Jesus.

“James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother” were the sons of a prominent fisherman in Capernaum on the northwest shore of the sea of Galilee. They were friends with Simon and Andrew and both sets of brothers are called by Jesus to be disciples on the very same day. James and John also became part of Jesus’ inner circle. They were with Jesus when he was transfigured and the garden of Gethsemane when Jesus prayed before his arrest and crucifixion. James and John were characterized early on as being passionate, zealous, aggressive and somewhat vengeful. In describing them in Mark 3:17 Jesus called them, *“boanerges,”* which means *“sons of thunder.”* We see that in the gospel of Luke when, as Jesus and his disciples were traveling through Samaria on their way to Jerusalem, they were refused lodging because of the hostility that existed between Jews and Samaritans. In response James and John asked Jesus: *“Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?”* (Luke 9:52-54). Their constant passion for Jesus was commendable but quite often their judgement was not.

These brothers were also extremely selfish and prideful, As their zeal and ambition had already gained them positions of intimacy with Jesus and prominence among the disciples - they got their mother to ask Jesus to sit them at the right and left-hand seats of power when Jesus reigns in his kingdom. It was probably that same zeal that eventually led to James being the very first martyr among the apostles. At that point James boldness surpassed that of Peter, and which caused him to be first target in Herod’s effort to suppress the first church in Jerusalem. James brother John was just as brash, zealous, ambitious, and vengeful as James – but over time he became gentle, loving and selfless - so much so that he has been called both the *“Apostle of love”* and *“the beloved Apostle.”* Most likely, part of the reason for this change was how overwhelmed John was over the fact that Jesus loved him - a point John makes several times his gospel account (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7,20).

The closeness of John's relationship with Jesus is also seen at Jesus' crucifixion when Jesus charged John to take care of his mother, Mary. Tradition holds that John did not leave Jerusalem until after Mary had died. Eventually he ended up in Ephesus and was then banished to the small, barren Isle of Patmos in the Aegean Sea where he received and recorded the book we know as "*Revelation*." He was the only who did not die as a martyr. He died about 98 A.D. during the reign of Emperor Trajan.

"*Philip and Bartholomew*." Just like first four disciples, Philip was also from Bethsaida and he was a friend of Simon Peter and Andrew. Philip is first mentioned in John 1:43 when Jesus finds him and calls him to follow Him. It was not long before Philip found his friend "*Nathanael*" and tells him, "*We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph*" (John 1:45). Bible scholars almost universally affirm that the man John calls "*Nathanael*" is in fact "*Bartholomew*" – which is the name that Mark, Matthew and Luke use instead of "*Nathanael*." Philip recognized Jesus was the Messiah according to the Old Testament prophecies because he was a diligent student of the Hebrew Scriptures. Philip also had a practical, analytical mind, which is generally a virtue, but also something that hindered him from spiritual insight and discernment at times.

Bartholomew was also a student of the Old Testament and he earnestly sought after the truth of God and the coming of Messiah as did Philip. But Bartholomew was more affected by his own prejudice, and instead of judging Jesus from Philip's report, he judged Jesus according to where Jesus was born and raised: "*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*" (John 1:46). However, Bartholomew was also more controlled by God's truth than his personal prejudice and he ended up following Jesus – to which Jesus said of him: "*Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!*" (John 1:47). Bartholomew reacted to Jesus with a question challenging Jesus to prove his words of his comment were true. Bartholomew was skeptical, but when Jesus answered him in away only the Messiah could, Bartholomew believed.

"*Thomas*" is often referred to as "*doubting Thomas*" because he said he would not believe Jesus had risen from the dead until he saw him and touched him. Thomas was also pessimistic. When Jesus took the disciples with him to raise Lazarus from the dead - Thomas, being aware of the danger of going that close to Jerusalem - said, "*Let us also go, that we may die with him*" (John 11:16). Thomas fully expected the religious leaders would come from Jerusalem to seize and kill Jesus and his disciples, yet within that pessimism was a commitment that was unequalled. Thomas totally believed in Jesus and wanted to be with him, and so he was ready to die with Jesus. We see this again in John 14 when Jesus told his disciples he would be going away. Thomas immediately wanted to know where, when and how.

"*Matthew, the tax collector*" is also called Levi (his Jewish name). He was a tax collector for the Romans, and therefore considered to be a traitor to his nation and worse than thieves and prostitutes. Whatever his character was, it was radically changed when Jesus said, "*Follow me,*" and Matthew got up from his tax table and followed - never to look back (Matthew 9:9). Matthew is the perfect example that our past is no hindrance to God. He can and will radically change us and use us if we will let him.

We don't know much about "*James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot*." *James the son of Alphaeus* who is also called "*James the lesser*" - both names distinguish him from James the son of Zebedee. He was also called, "*the lesser*" either as a reference to being younger in age or smaller in size. Nothing he said or did is recorded. He preached the gospel in Persia and was crucified there. *Thaddaeus* was a name usually used as a reference to the youngest child in a family. He was also called Judas, the son of James. The only words of his recorded in Scripture are in John 14:22 when he asks Jesus: "*Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?*" *Simon the Zealot* was a man who was probably a member of radical political party of the Zealots. They wanted Rome overthrown and they used guerilla tactics such as assassinations and ambushes as an effort to achieve their ends. But whatever originally motivated Simon to join Jesus, his national zeal was replaced by his devotion to Jesus. All three of these little-known men were faithful to Jesus and endured many things on his behalf.

“Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him” was a man controlled by self-desire. He was a greedy man of whom Scripture tell us that he stole from the group’s finances when he was their treasurer. His greatest act of greediness was his betrayal of our Lord Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. His greatest hypocrisy was using a kiss as the sign of betrayal to the Lord. There is much that could be said about this man, but all of it is negative. And so why did Jesus choose Judas to be an apostle? Well, the truth is, a person can pretend to love God and can live their lives in the midst of God’s people – but still reject God’s will in the pursuit of their own will. But God can still use that person. Judas was evil, but he was needed, for there had to be someone to betray Jesus in order to fulfill the Scriptures. God needed a man with a wicked heart, and Jesus called him and choose him and Judas fulfilled the reason he was chosen. But Judas is the greatest tragedy of humanity in that he lived with Jesus for three years, yet he still turned his back on him. What all of this means is that regardless of who we are what we have done and what we are like today - God can use us and He will use us. But it’s up to us – it’s up to each one of us - as to whether or not God will us *positively or negatively* to do the work of Jesus that Jesus has given us to do.

After Jesus called his twelve disciples together and anointed them to be his *“apostles.”* And in doing so they became the hands of his authority to carry out the work of his ministry into the world – which was to be Jesus’ hands to bring in the harvest of lost souls. In the remainder of our text for today Jesus then shares with them the principles and instructions as to how to harvest lost souls and bring them into the Kingdom of God. The twelve apostles of Jesus were called and chosen to share the gospel and in the words we read today we hear Jesus sharing the principles and instructions the apostles are to use in the gospel ministry they were to carry out. Jesus had personally demonstrated the power of his authority as the sovereign God and King of the Kingdom of God - and now he delegates that same authority to his apostles to be the hands of Jesus to carry out his ministry into the world – which is the same work and the same authority and the same ministry of Jesus hands that God calls us to in his church today.

These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Matthew 10:5-6

The first principle of the gospel ministry for Jesus is that *gospel ministry needs to be focused.* We see focus of ministry in that Jesus sent his apostles only to the *“lost sheep of the house of Israel.”* They were not to go to the Gentiles or Samaritans. This was according to God’s order and plan. Israel was God’s chosen nation and they were to take the knowledge and understanding of God to all the nations. And so the message of the kingdom needed to go to them first. That is why Jesus focused His ministry upon the Jews and why He had the apostles do the same. This was the apostle Paul’s ministry, he went to the Jews first, then the Gentiles. In Acts 10 Peter even receives a vision from the Lord prompting him to go to Cornelius, a Gentile, and deliver the gospel to him and his household. In Acts 1:8 Jesus tells them that they were to be His *“witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

The gospel ministry for Jesus is a ministry needs to be focused. No one can do everything there is to do, and if there is no focus to our ministry, then it will be doomed to mediocrity with nothing being done well. God’s design is that we all function together as a body, the body of Christ. You can look up and study Romans 12 or 1 Corinthians 12 to see that design clearly. Each of us plays a vital role in the total design of what God wants to have accomplished. Notice back in Matthew 9:37 when Jesus called the disciples’ attention to the fact that *“the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few,”* that Jesus did not immediately send them out doing whatever they happened to see. He first had them praying for God to send workers. They needed to focus first and seek God in it. The disciples were men searching for God’s will. Jesus called them and trained them - and in fact their going out was part of their training - and now they are being increasingly used to meet the needs of the harvest around them. In the same way we need to first seek the Lord to see what He wants us to do. Just because we see a need does not necessarily mean we are the ones that God wants to meet it. Then again, perhaps you may be the one.

“And proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” Matthew 10:7

The second principle of the gospel ministry for Jesus is that *the gospel message needs to be clear*. One of the things that have made Christianity weak on the North American continent is the fact that the gospel message is not presented clearly. The gospel message is not difficult. God is holy and He created humanity in His image. Humanity turned away from God and sinned and is now not only deserving of God’s holy judgment - but is also incapable of escaping the bondage of sin on his own. God is loving and determined to redeem humanity by paying the penalty of sin Himself through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary. God offers salvation from sin and its effects to those who believe His message and place their faith and their trust in Jesus Christ alone. But this good news of the gospel message is becoming ever more muddled and confused. Some groups place tradition and liturgy in front of Christ and obscure him. Others concentrate on doing good works to earn their way and remain lost because they trust themselves, not Jesus. Some groups focus on religious philosophy and speak of Jesus in terms of a role model, which fails to recognize personal sin and need of a savior. Others see the gospel as psychology where the gospel is not about our sin, but about God’s grace to help us with low self-esteem and victimization. Other groups embrace a gospel-lite theology where the sharp edges of the gospel have been removed and the sermons are about morality and the mission of the church is to be happy. Others see the gospel as an opportunity to be blessed by God with health, wealth and prosperity believing God has promised us a care-free, worry-free, pain-free life. Still others see the gospel as a footnote to the letter of the law, which blurs the gospel by a host of minor issues that are magnified into disputes and divisions. The gospel message needs to be clear. Jesus himself told us to say, *“The kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*

Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay.
Matthew 10:8

The third principle of the gospel ministry for Jesus is that *gospel ministry should reflect the work of Christ*. While we may not be able to *replicate* the miracles of Jesus that were done by the apostles, God does call us to *reflect* them. We can reflect *healing the sick* by praying for and caring for those who are burdened with sickness and illness. We can reflect *raising the dead* by praying for the lost and sharing the gospel with the lost, so that souls that are dead to God might *rise from the dead* and surrender their hearts and lives to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. We can reflect *cleansing the lepers* by loving and embracing and caring for the marginalized and outcasts and the “least of these” in life. We can reflect *casting out demons* by waging war against evil through prayer and the Word of God and taking stands against the darkness of Satan that continues to infect our homes, our communities and our world. *“You received without paying; give without pay”* means that while we cannot minister in the same miraculous manner as the apostles did then, there is a principle we do need to follow - and that is to *live a life of ministry*. *“You received without paying; give without pay”* tells us that all that we have - our spiritual gifts, our natural talents and everything we own - has come to us because of God’s grace to us. We are not to be stingy in using what we have to serve the Lord by serving others. We are to freely give of ourselves.

Acquire no gold or silver or copper for your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics or sandals or a staff, for the laborer deserves his food. Matthew 10:9-10

The fourth principle of the gospel ministry for Jesus is *our hearts must trust God*. Jesus told the apostles that they were to trust that God would meet their needs. They were not to take any money along – gold, silver or copper. They were not to take extra clothes, shoes or even a staff. Basically, no suitcases allowed. They were not even to take a bag or sack in which they would have food for the journey. The reason? *“The laborer deserves his food.”* They would earn their living as they ministered. The principle here is that we need to trust the God and not worry and fret and try to make provision for every possible circumstance that may come up. We see this in Matthew 6:25, 33 *“do not be anxious about your life. . . But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”*

And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart. As you enter the house, greet it. And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, Matthew 10:11-13a

The fifth principle of the gospel ministry for Jesus is to *concentrate of those who respond*. The “house” referred to here is whatever home they would stay in when they came into the city or village. It was considered “worthy” based on how the host/hostess received the apostles and not on the condition of the house itself. The idea of a greeting of “peace” being received is that the “shalom” given by the apostle - the wish for those in the house to have total well-being in mind, body, and spirit - would be confirmed by their receptiveness to the apostle’s message. The principle here is that we need to concentrate our efforts on those who respond to the message of the gospel. Yes, we are called to proclaim the gospel to everyone. Mark 16:15 says: “*go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation.*” But the time we spend needs to be concentrated on those who respond - *so that* we can fulfill of making disciples of all the nations, baptizing them, and teaching them all of the Lord’s commandments. To relate this to the harvest - we are to be busy gathering in the wheat, not making extended examinations of the weeds.

But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town. Matt 10:13b-15

The sixth principle of the gospel ministry for Jesus is to *remove ourselves from those who do not listen*. This is the negative side of the fifth principle of concentrating on those who respond. Here Jesus tells us there is a point when we need to stop sharing the gospel: “*If anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town.*” Jesus put it another way in Matthew 7:6: “*Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.*” While this might seem to be somewhat harsh, we do need to remember that we are not the Savior. While we are called to share the gospel, we are not responsible for anyone’s constant rejection of it. We need to remember that the gospel message is also one of judgment that people are in sin who will pay the penalty of that sin unless they repent and receive God’s forgiveness. The fifth principle affirms this principle in that time spent on constant rejection of the gospel, keeps us from making disciples. The apostles were directed to give an outward sign of shaking the dust off their feet. This sign arose from the practice of Jews who had traveled in a Gentile land. When they returned to Judea they would shake off the dust from that country – and outward protest against the people who had rejected God’s message. This principle does not apply to those that are slow to understand or believe, but against those who have clearly heard the gospel so they clearly understand it - but still continue to resist and oppose it. Their condemnation will be greater than that of Sodom and Gomorrah, because they had been given the words of life and rejected it. Yes, we are always to share the gospel, but at some point, we are remove ourselves from those who do not listen – and give that person back to God. It is possible they may not ever come to faith in Christ or perhaps its God’s plan for them to come to faith at a later time. In the meantime, move on and share the gospel with someone else.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are also to be Jesus’ disciples – which means we have been sent by God to proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom for Jesus Christ – wherever we are in life, wherever we live on this earth. Jesus called his followers to be his “*witnesses.*” Our English dictionaries define a *witness* as someone “who can give a firsthand account of something they have seen, heard, or experienced.” The Greek word for “*witness*” in the original language starts with the same basic meaning – but then makes a few changes to fully clarify what it means to be a witness for Jesus. To be a “*witness*” for Jesus Christ means to be someone “who gives a firsthand account by sacrificially following Jesus because they have seen, heard, and experienced the life-changing, heart-transforming, soul-restoring power of the risen Christ.” The work of salvation could be accomplished only by Jesus Christ, and he did it alone. But the *witness* of this salvation could only be accomplished those who have trusted him and been saved by him. May we be the hands of Jesus that gather the harvest for Jesus by sharing the gospel of Jesus. Amen?

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