

Text: Matthew 10:1-42

Title: Commissioning of the 12

Truth: The disciples are sent to proclaim the Kingdom to Israel.

Date/Location: Wednesday October 13; Sunday October 17, 2021 at FBC

Introduction

Please note this fact to begin: the kingdom commission of the 12 disciples is *not the same as* the Great Commission. This will become clear as we carefully read the text. Even so, there are similarities in the missions and surrounding conditions from which we can learn much.

I. Power Given, 10:1

A. Jesus gave his disciples spiritual power akin to what He himself exercised:

1. To cast out demons.
2. To heal all kinds of sickness and disease.
3. To raise people from the dead.

B. It is hard to imagine how this looked, and how it felt to the disciples. How could they suddenly have the authority to fix people's illnesses, and call back spirits from the afterlife, and cast out demons? It became part of their spiritual existence. It did not change their physical constitution but it must have "felt" strange.

II. Disciples Named, 10:2-4

A. There were twelve men selected by Jesus for special ministry. They are named elsewhere in Scripture as well. Here is a table showing the correspondence of the names from the other lists:

Matthew 10:2-4	Mark 3:14-19	Luke 6:13-16	John 1:40- 45, 21:2	Acts 1:13
Simon Peter	Simon Peter	Simon Peter	Simon Peter	Peter
Andrew	Andrew	Andrew	Andrew	Andrew

Matthew 10:2-4	Mark 3:14-19	Luke 6:13-16	John 1:40- 45, 21:2	Acts 1:13
James (son of Zebedee)	James (son of Zebedee)	James	James (son of Zebedee)	James
John ¹	John ¹	John ¹	John ^{1, 2}	John ¹
Philip	Philip	Philip	Philip ³	Philip
Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Nathanael (of Cana in Galilee)	Bartholomew
Thomas	Thomas	Thomas	Thomas ⁷	Thomas
Matthew ⁶	Matthew ⁶	Matthew ⁶		Matthew
James ⁸	James ⁸	James ⁸		James ⁸
Lebaeus Thaddaeus	Thaddaeus	Judas son of James		Judas son of James
Simon the Cananite	Simon the Cananite	Simon the Zealot		Simon the Zealot
Judas Iscariot ⁴	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot		

¹ James and John, are brothers, also known as *Boanerges*, sons of thunder.

² John is not named in the gospel of John. He is called "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

³ Of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

⁴ The betrayer.

⁵ Simon Peter's brother.

⁶ A tax collector (Matt. 10:3, Mark 2:14, Luke 5:27), Hebrew name Levi, son of Alphaeus. Unclear if this is the brother of James, the other son of Alphaeus, but the fact that they are not placed side-by-side indicates not.

⁷ Thomas was called Didymus, that is, twin

⁸ This James is the son of Alphaeus.

⁹ Simon is not a Canaanite (contra KJV?), but a Cananite or Cananaen. This would be to put his origin in Cana of Galilee. However, Online Bible and BDAG indicate this is not the right meaning. BDAG: "Not a toponym from *Cana* (Jerome) nor *Canaanite*, but from Aramaic... 'enthusiast, zealot.'" This works nicely with the Luke and Acts passages that label him specifically a "Zealot" or formerly of the party of the freedom fighters. These desired to throw Roman rule off the back of Israel.

III. Mission Assigned, 10:5-15

A. The target audience v. 5-6. They are told to go only to Israel. This is where it becomes clear that the kingdom commission of the 12 disciples is not the same as the Great Commission recorded in Matthew 28:18-20 and parallel passages. There, the disciples are told to go to *all nations*. Here, they are specifically commanded *not* to go to all nations!

This is important for those who attempt to take from this passage a mandate to heal and cast out demons and so forth. That was for *that* time and *those* disciples in *that* place. It is not the “all nations” Great Commission that simply told the disciples to focus on making disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them to obey the Lord’s instructions.

B. The message, v. 7. They were to preach, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” The kingdom has come near to the nation in the person of their Messiah King, and they must respond with...what? This summary statement does not say, but we know exactly what it is from earlier in Matthew’s gospel.

The called-for response is exactly what the Lord and John the Baptist before Him said: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2, 4:17). This was at once a joyful message, because God was offering to establish His kingdom on earth; and it was a convicting message, because the subjects of the kingdom had to deal with their sin which separated them from their King.

C. The authentication, v. 8a. To back up their message, they were commanded to heal the sick, cleanse lepers, raise the dead, and cast out demons. They were to use the power that Jesus gave to them to the full. The message with the main course. The miracles were the proof that the meal was real.

D. The free ministry, v. 8b. They were told to use these gifts as much as they could. They had received freely, and they were now to distribute it freely. They would take the Lord’s delegated authority and multiply its benefits throughout the nation of Israel. They were not to charge for their “services.” You can imagine someone who could heal others might charge exorbitant fees if they were greedy.

- E. The financial support, v. 9-10. They were to live on the voluntary contributions of the people in the areas where they were ministering. They did not need to take a store of money (gold, silver, copper), nor a bag for garments or supplies, nor extra clothing, nor extra shoes, nor walking stick. The principle that Jesus states, recorded also by Luke (10:7) and confirmed to be Scripture by Paul (1 Tim. 5:18), was this: “The worker is worthy of his food.” Those who proclaim the gospel should be supported by the people who have been saved by that gospel (1 Cor. 9:14). The apostles and other vocational workers have a right to eat and drink, thus they have a right to support, which is usually financial. It could also be “in kind” support like food. See also Gal. 6:6.
- F. Sense of urgency. The tenor of the text conveys a genuine sense of urgency. This mission needs to be done quickly. The King was present and the establishment of the kingdom was in the balance right then. In our commission, people are dying and need to know the Lord to be secure for eternity as well as to be living rightly today.

The lightweight travel arrangements are one indication of the urgency. Also, Luke 10:4 says that they are to “greet no one on the way.” I take this to mean not that they are prohibited from saying a friendly “hello,” but that they cannot stop on the way to visit, eating up a lot of time as they go to the population centers.

- G. Accommodations, v. 11-13. The disciples were to seek a worthy person or family, go to that place, to stay for the duration of their ministry in that location. This was another part of their support—accommodations. They were not to put up in a hotel! When they came to the household, the Lord told them to give their greetings, and find out if the people were hospitable. It seems that the disciples were to observe whether the people would receive the message of the King...and if so, they would be declared worthy. If not, they would be unworthy and the shalom (peace)—prosperity, blessing, health, and so forth—would not rest on that home. From disciples who had power to heal and raise the dead, this declaration was doubtless more than mere words. A real blessing came to those homes from Heaven.

There are two interesting principles that come to mind from this passage.

1. The worthy household principle. The Lord tells the disciples to inquire around the town as to who is worthy. The answer would come back “so and so” who is the head of “such and such” a household. “If the *household* is worthy...” then the disciples’ peace is to remain upon it. The “worthy” household does not mean that the house is somehow “owed” salvation or has earned it already by its conduct, but that it appears, from the disciples’ external vantage point, that this is an honorable household, even a God-fearing one who does not yet know the way of salvation in Jesus Christ. Maybe the members attended synagogue and were observant Jews and cared about spiritual matters. Maybe they were God-fearing Gentiles who attended synagogue (or built a synagogue, Luke 7:5). Perhaps they could not attend religious services because the Jews did not wish them to be present.

There are many “household” texts in the New Testament. The family of God is spoken of as a household (Mat. 10:25, Gal. 6:10, Eph. 2:19). But particular families were impacted by the gospel:

- Lydia and members of her **household** were saved and baptized (Acts 16:15).
- Paul told the Philippian jailer that to be saved he had to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and that this applies to “you and your **household**” (Acts 16:31). Then the prison guard did in fact believe, and so did his whole **household** (Acts 16:34).
- Cornelius feared God with all his **household** (Acts 10:2). An angel told Cornelius he would hear words from Peter by which he and his whole **household** would be saved (Acts 11:14).
- Crispus who was ruler of the synagogue believed on the Lord, and his whole **household** did the same (Acts 18:8).
- A father whose son was healed by the Lord began to believe in Christ, along with his **household** (John 4:53).

- Paul baptized the **household** of Stephanas (1 Cor. 1:16). They were the firstfruits of the gospel (1 Cor. 16:15).
- Hebrews tells us that Noah was moved with godly fear to build an ark to save his **household** (Heb. 11:7).

These household passages are far from implying baby-baptism—not a one of them indicates that. Rather, such texts have a far more clear and critical implication: the gospel can move into whole households. You probably have heard mom and dad being saved, and the kids becoming Christians as well. You may have heard of missionary stories where the chief of a tribe converts to Christ, and the other members of the tribe follow him. We may doubt the genuineness of every profession in the family or tribe, and only time will tell outside observers with any accuracy, but we should also not dismiss such household or tribal conversions. God can and does work through human leaders. If an influential leader converts to Jesus, he may indeed have a sanctifying effect on many people around him.

This idea implies that as we do evangelistic work, we should keep ourselves aware of worthy households as well as receptive individuals that may need and be open to receiving the Lord. We should reach into the household to the mom and dad to evangelize them for Christ. Then they can bring the children along. We should include the entire family in our evangelism and witnessing if it is at all possible. Sometimes the reverse is successful—reaching the children and getting the kids through the parents. But the parents have more influence. A child who is saved but has unbelieving parents is going to be in a tough spot. Better than not being saved, to be sure, but if the father and mother could be saved, it would be even better for the kids.

Pause and think for a minute about *your* household. What is each member's relationship to the Lord? What have you done to make sure your household has heard and obeyed the words of the Lord—the only ones by which anyone can be saved? Would you be a worthy household for the Lord's disciples to stay at for a while?

2. The person of peace principle. This kind of person is a person who already may have some of God's work going on in them, with perhaps an extra measure of common grace already operational in their lives. They will likely be more responsive to the gospel, or at least willing to listen. They are not like the hardline atheist, free-thinker, evolutionist, etc. who will not consider supernatural truths.

The idea is that we should be keeping our eyes open for people of peace and people of peace within worthy households. They may be ones who will be saved and supportive of the work of the gospel. They will not raise strong opposition to the gospel. It is this kind of person for which we are on the lookout. When we encounter people whose faces are hard against the gospel, we must move on and find others who will respond favorably.

There is no time to waste.

H. Instructions for Recalcitrant Audiences, v. 14-15. Households or cities that would not receive the disciples nor hear their words were condemned. Either they did not allow the disciples to speak, or let them speak but ignored what they said—in effect closing their ears to the message.

In such a case, the Lord says that the disciples should shake off the dust from their feet. Acts 13:51 records that Paul did this one time. This is a well-known metaphor for rejection and separation. You as a believer picture that want nothing to do with the attitude displayed in that place by getting rid even of their dust. The people associated with that dust will be the recipients of severe judgment by God, and you want nothing to do with it.

A scary statement of judgment is given in verse 15: it will be worse than Sodom and Gomorrah for those areas of Israel who refuse to listen to the message, and refuse to repent of their sin, and refuse to acknowledge their King. Do you remember what happened to those two ancient cities? They were decimated by fire and brimstone—perhaps lava from a volcano, or a supernatural bombardment from heaven. To say that there is a heavier punishment than this sounds very ominous. Yet the physical destruction of the cities was not all that God can do:

Matthew 10:28 – And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

IV. Dangers of the Mission, 10:16-39

- A. Wolves. False teaching and unbelievers with governmental power or community influence will be out to get the disciples. It is just like that today, when they do so under some nice-sounding guise (keeping the peace, protecting the children, standing up against Christian “immorality” in its teaching, etc.) Some will even think of themselves as doing a useful service for God (John 16:2).
- B. Persecution, v. 16-17a. Be sheep, be wise, be harmless, and beware. The Christian person is harmless like a sheep—the most harmless kind of person there is. It always amazes me how the world treats the Christian and the church as if they are some dangerous thing. If you just leave them alone, they will try to persuade others to become Christians, but they are not revolutionaries or criminals or rabble-rousers (if they are rightly following the true faith). True also: Christian citizens will demand righteousness. But if you take that as a threat, then you need to check your sensitivity level or be tough enough to do your sin without being offended by Christian preaching.

The Christian is also to be wise, not foolish. Examples of unwise Christians abound. There are those who repeat foolish conspiracies; those who do not make wise life choices; those who make misguided decisions, those who heed discredited news sources. And then they act as if they are persecuted if people ridicule them for those things...not for their faith, mind you.

The Christian is also enjoined to beware. We are to be wary of pagan people to a certain extent, because they will deliver us up to the authorities. This means they will arrest us and try us and put us in jail and take money and property and punish us physically, and so forth. We should take advantage of legal shields provided by our citizenship (like Paul did, Acts 22:25), and a generally wise approach to life where we keep our heads down and avoid unnecessary controversy.

- C. Again, remember that this is not the Great Commission of Matthew 28, etc. But because the later commission involves the propagation of divine truth, there will be similarities between it and this prior commission. Not all our brothers and sisters throughout history have experienced bad things because of the gospel, but some (perhaps many) have, and as the times of the Gentiles draw to a close (Luke 21:24), persecution will grow worse and worse.
- D. Persecution, part 2, v. 17-26. Religious and secular leaders will cooperate together to persecute Christians. They will do so with what we would call cruel and unusual punishments like scourging.
- E. What the anti-God leaders will intend is to destroy the work of Christians and the work of God. But what will happen instead is that it will turn out as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles (v. 18). Note Paul, for example, who reported that the things which happened to him to bring him from Jerusalem to Caesarea to Malta to Rome “actually served to advance the gospel” (Phil. 1:12). Later on in the same letter, Paul conveyed greetings of certain saints, including those in Caesar’s household (Phil. 4:22)! There were evidently some of the king’s own family and servants who had received the love of Christ because Paul was sent there to testify. On the way, Felix and Festus and Agrippa were leaders who heard the gospel and saw that it was not revolutionary, nor any kind of threat to their leadership.
- F. The Lord tells us that if we encounter that situation, do not worry about what you will say (10:19-20). The Spirit of God will help you when the time comes. This is no prohibition against *preparation*; it is a prohibition against *worry*. Just expect it, and do not be unduly moved by it. Recently Pastor John MacArthur was quite confident that he would prevail in the courts about gathering as a church, and properly so. But he said if the authorities put him in jail, he would start a jail ministry! He has not done that yet.
- G. Family members will hate each other on account of the faith (10:21).
- H. Hatred by all society will be directed at Christians (22a). Roman emperor Nero induced much of this in his day. Propaganda caused people to hate Christians.

I. Verse 22b says, “But he who endures to the end will be saved.” This is taken in two ways. Some teach that it speaks of physical deliverance at the end of persecution—those who “make it” to the end when the Lord returns will be rescued. A case can be made for this; it will happen to some in the Great Tribulation.

Others teach that it speaks of the doctrine of perseverance, namely that if your faith endures to the end—whether that end comes through death by persecution or you survive until the second coming of Christ—you will be spiritually delivered. True disciples who survive the tribulations of persecution *and* those who die by persecution will experience spiritual salvation. In both cases, they maintain faith in Christ up to the end. I lean in this second direction now, though in the past I understood the text in the first way. As I examine it more, it appears redundant to say that those who endure to the end physically will be rescued physically—because they already made it to the end. Rather, the spiritual pressures of persecution will be tremendous and will flush out those who are fake believers. It will take true spiritual life and commitment to keep on believing during terrible difficulties.

I am a staunch supporter of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. But it is NOT right to explain it such that it is a work that must be done to maintain salvation. Nor is it to be cast as a reason to always doubt your own eternal security as if your faith might fail and you will be lost in the end. Perseverance teaches that because of God’s work in the genuine believer’s life, he or she will continue to believe for the rest of life and will not fail. It is ultimately based on *God*, not on *human effort*, but it involves our participation. That is to say, *Christians persevere because God preserves*, and we still have an active role to play in continuing to believe (Heb. 3:14).

Back to verse 22b: the text is talking about people persecuting, jailing, and killing Christians. The translation of “he who endures to the end will be saved” is “those who physically survive until the return of Christ will be rescued from tribulation.” It is speaking of physical rescue, not spiritual rescue.

J. Flee, v. 23. The Lord says when (not if) they persecute you in one place, flee to another. There is nothing shameful about fleeing. The

Lord told us to do it. He knows we cannot overcome strong persecutions. He knows that the mission cannot be accomplished effectively when there is persecution. He may use that persecution to awake some of the souls there to the evil nature of their rulers and persuade them to turn to Christ because of what they have heard. Meanwhile, the gospel ministers have moved on to another place and are spreading the gospel there as well.

Persecution was used by the Lord as a way to spread the gospel. Read the book of Acts to see it. The persecution of Stephen scattered disciples everywhere (Acts 8:1). Paul was persecuted and could not stay long in some cities where he was (Acts 13:50, 14:5, 16:39, 17:5, etc.)

- K. The persecution will continue, and the gospel will continue to spread, but they disciples will not be able to completely blanket the nation of Israel before the Lord returns. It is difficult today, for example, to start new evangelistic work in Israel. And not all the ancient Jewish cities are even under Jewish control. Arab/Muslim control is found in some areas there and it is simply not possible to widely evangelize. In any case, the task of the kingdom commission was not destined to be finished, and even the Great Commission which is the center of our work will not be completed before the Lord returns. That should not be due to our laziness. Any incompleteness in the work should be only the result of persecution and rejection by those who hate the Lord. Gospel work is a never-ending task with never-ending enemies. Be assured that those enemies will be sorry that they did not listen to the gospel, and they will be culpable for preventing others from hearing the gospel.
- L. Like teacher, like student, v. 24-26. Jesus told His 12 disciples that they were not above Him. He was going to be persecuted, and so would they. The religious leaders called Jesus the Devil. The followers of Jesus would also be called devils. Is that not true today? This all is to be expected, so do not fear those kind of people. They will be exposed for what they are—nothing covered will remain that way forever. The hidden secrets of hearts will be made known.

- M. Verse 27 tells the believers to keep on preaching the truth no matter what opposition comes. What they learn in the secret place of study of God's word (or, for the disciples, what the Spirit teaches them), they are to yell from the housetops so all can hear.
- N. Do not fear, v. 28 says, those who kill the body. Instead, we should not fear them precisely because we fear Someone else—God. This is almost entirely absent from our society today. Who in the news media is saying that as dangerous as climate change or COVID is, there is something yet more dangerous, and you all should be fearing that? No one says that. Shamefully, even Christians have been carried away into the fears of the world, just like Peter and Barnabas were carried away (Gal. 2:12-13). We are fearing something which we suppose will kill the body. Instead, we need to fear God, friends. God first, everything else after that.
- O. Verses 29-31 teach us that God cares for us. When a sparrow dies, God knows. When His people are persecuted, He sees (Exodus 3:7). Therefore, we are not to fear.
- P. The Lord speaks again of a matter related to perseverance (v. 32-33). Christians are those who confess Christ before people. They are not ultimately afraid. They may have failures along the way, but their habit and pattern is to acknowledge Christ. Christ will present them before the Father in Heaven as His own. But those who deny Christ in this life will be denied by the Lord Jesus before the Father. The first are truly saved people; the second are not. The second group are not guilty of an occasional or temporary failure like Peter. They are those who love the world, not the Lord (James 4:4).
- Q. The divisions over Christ Jesus will be severe. The Lord is the issue over which the world is divided in two. As a result, violence will break out ("the sword"). Even family members will hate one another because of differences of faith in Christ. As a result, people who choose their family connections over Jesus demonstrate that they love the world more than they love God (see above). It is not a matter of hating your kin; it is a matter of loving Jesus more than them. Therefore, those who would follow Jesus must take up their cross, that is, be willing to die for Him. Those who do so in effect "lose" their earthly life, but they will find life in Christ. Those who

cling to this life will lose it and demonstrate they are not worthy of Christ. (I wonder if there is a connection between this “worthy” and the worthy household in 10:11?)

V. Blessings in the Mission, 10:40-42

- A. Verses 16-39 focus on the negative aspects of the kingdom mission, and by extension, any work done for God. Verses 40-42 change that focus to the positive parts of the mission.
- B. Namely, when a messenger of the Lord is well received by his audience, it is a sure indication that the audience also receives the Lord, and in turn receives God the Father who sent Jesus. There is no better feeling than to know that your message has been well received and accepted in the hearts of your listeners.
- C. Those who are the “receivers” of God’s messengers will receive a reward from God the Father. There are evidently different kinds of reward, but the specifics are not spelled out:
 1. Prophet’s reward: given to those who receive the prophet as a prophet.
 2. Righteous man’s reward: given to those who receive a righteous man.
 3. The “cup of cold water” reward for those who give relief to a disciple. A “little one” is a disciple.

It may well be that what the Lord is saying here is that if you take heed to and/or help a prophet or righteous man or disciple of Jesus, you will *share* in the same kind of reward that they get. You do not want to share with those who do evil (2 John 11).

- D. Ministry has a reward from God, but the good parts of ministry are themselves one reward of ministry. It is such a blessing to receive a cup of cold water with the care and love of another disciple “behind it.” It is a blessing to see people respond favorably to the work of God by receiving the messenger and his message.

Conclusion

The 12 have a hard job to do. But there are blessings along the way and a superb blessing at the end. MAP