

SENDS

Mark 6:7-13, 30-32

After Jesus began His public ministry, He experienced a strong wave of popularity. There were great crowds that followed Him. He taught them, many people were healed and great miracles were done. Even during this time of popularity, there were pockets of opposition and resistance, especially among the Jewish religious leaders. This opposition grew until it finally became open hostility and took action in the arrest, false conviction, and crucifixion of Jesus. There were other oppositions and rejections that Jesus encountered during the early part of His ministry and it came from people closest to Him. His family members (mother, brothers, and sisters) found Him to be an embarrassment. At one time they came to get Him to take Him home. At the height of His popularity, He returned to His hometown along with His disciples. He was not appreciated among those people. They still saw Him as the carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of their neighbors. Their attitude could be expressed by “Who does He think He is?”

Jesus’ claim to be the Messiah after reading from Isaiah in the synagogue (recorded in Luke) was especially hard for them to accept and when He told them that the prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled in Him, they even tried to kill Him. We can’t be too critical of them, for I suspect that we might behave in somewhat the same way. Admittedly, we would not try to physically kill someone but we would do it verbally. We might say, “He’s just another religious fanatic, ignore Him and maybe He will go away.”

Do we ever wonder why we see so few miracles? Some of the other gospel writers say that Jesus could do no great work among them because of their unbelief. It is rather frightening to realize that we can limit what God can or will do in our lives by our lack of belief.

If Jesus was amazed that the people of Nazareth experienced unbelief, He must be totally flabbergasted at the unbelief that is in the world today, but especially in our nation, even here where we live in the so-called Bible Belt. If Jesus had started His public ministry at Nazareth, then we could more easily understand how the people would have trouble believing; however, Jesus had already proven His power many times over in other areas of Judea and Galilee. The word had spread and they had heard but they chose to not believe and in so doing limited the help that they could receive. In spite of the general rejection, Jesus did not give up but ministered where He could. This should be the pattern that we follow: minister where we can and minister in spite of rejection.

Sent by Jesus – 6:7

⁷ And He summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits; Mark 6:7 (NASB95)

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus had taught the basics of the Kingdom of God and these principles would provide the directions that His disciples needed to follow as they shared the message of the Kingdom. Jesus had demonstrated how this Kingdom would impact lives in the miracles which the disciples had witnessed. The third step beyond being directed and having seen the demonstrations was to be delegated to go and do the same for others.

The disciples of Jesus had seen the rejection that Jesus experienced and they had seen that Jesus did not just give up and go home, but He kept on helping those who would let Him – those who would believe. They needed to see His example, because Jesus was going to send them out to minister to people’s needs and He knew that they too would experience rejection by some.

We see a demonstration of a principle that most of us know but fail to follow in many instances. We typically think of this principle as “freely you have received, freely give.” Another consideration of this could be stated as “if you have been called, then you will be sent.” Another version of this might be “if you have been taught, then you should teach others.”

He did not send them out alone, but two by two. There was a good practical reason for this methodology. The pair could help and encourage each other. A less obvious reason for having two people deliver the message of the Kingdom of God was that they were witnesses to what had already been happening with the demonstrations of power and authority by Jesus and they would be witnesses to what would happen as they ministered to the needs of people. The Jews were familiar with the requirements of the Law that two or more witnesses were needed to confirm a testimony.

He sent them out with the proper tools. In this case, Jesus gave them power over unclean spirits. (Matthew records that Jesus gave them instruction to heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out devils.) The message that Jesus was delivering was that the Kingdom of God had come and that kingdom was being opposed by the kingdom of the devil that was impacting the lives of people. The ministry of casting out demons and healing people was a direct assault on the kingdom of darkness. One of the problems was that the expectation of the people was that the Kingdom that Jesus was proclaiming was going to physically attack the Romans. That would be like treating the symptom rather than healing the disease of a person.

Jesus also sent them out with hope (expectation). Based on what they had already seen in the ministry of Jesus they were anticipating that something similar was going to happen. They had faith that was bolstered by their expectations and was eventually confirmed by people being delivered and healed. We could make an argument that this was somewhat of a “practice run” or “dress rehearsal” of what Jesus would tell them they should be doing after His earthly ministry was completed. We read in John 14:12 that “he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also.”

Equipped by Jesus – 6:8-11

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.” Mark 6:8–11 (NASB95)

We might summarize these instructions as “travel light, walk by faith, have a sense of urgency, and be efficient.” This was going to be a relatively short-time-duration trip and they would be just passing through the villages and towns with an intent to return to a pre designated meeting time and place. They did not need to take any excessive baggage such as an extra walking staff or extra clothing (a second tunic) which might be needed if it were winter time.

In that culture, hospitality toward travelers was expected and practiced and that would help them with food to eat and a place to stay. The “bag” mentioned in the instructions is thought to be a reference to a collection bag that beggars would use as they sought help from others. Apparently, there were “beggar priests” who would travel around and for a “donation” would minister to people in the towns and villages. It would be important that Jesus’ disciples not be confused with those people as they shared the good news of the Kingdom of God in a town and confirmed their message with people being delivered and healed.

Mark didn’t give a lot of details about what the disciples would do when they came into a

town or village. Matthew adds an important component that would help in their mission. They were to ask the people in the town about those who were natural leaders in the community and those who were gracious to others who visited their area. It is likely that some people in the community had heard about the message and the miracles that were associated with Jesus. It would be quite natural for the two disciples to tell this influential person or family that Jesus had sent them to minister to people in their area.

As we might expect, some would be open to hearing the message of the kingdom and supportive of anyone who would be able to help people who were struggling because of spiritual, emotional or physical health problems. Their reaction would likely be to welcome the two travelers and provide a place to sleep and food to eat. They might even have someone in their household go invite their friends to come hear what these representatives of the teacher and miracle workers had to say.

The other alternative might be someone who had heard the accounts of the miracles and would not believe that it was a good thing. Those who rejected the message might not be likely to welcome anyone who said they were sent by Jesus.

Just as people who had needs sought out Jesus when He came near their area, there were people in the various communities that would be open and hopeful that they could be helped, also. The anticipation of being help with their problems and illnesses drew them to the disciples and they were able to hear the call to repentance and to turn back to God.

If the leader in a village or town was not open to the message, then it was likely that people would be reluctant to listen to the good news about the Kingdom of God and would not be open to accept any help with the problems in their lives. It would be like what Jesus had experienced in His hometown that He could do no great work among them because of their unbelief.

There are consequences of rejection for the person that does the rejecting. Jesus said that judgment day is coming and everyone is going to be accountable.

Empowered by Jesus – 6:12-13

¹² They went out and preached that men should repent. ¹³ And they were casting out many demons and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them. Mark 6:12-13 (NASB95)

The starting place for each person in the restoration of his or her relationship with God is repentance. John the Baptist proclaimed it, Jesus preached it, and the disciples declared it as they went into the villages and towns. Repenting is putting an end to our rejection of God and His will for our lives. It is a decision that each one has to face.

Often, the idea of “repentance” is presented as “being sorry for doing something wrong.” That emotion is more accurately described as “remorse” rather than “repentance.” Remorse is simply a first step (or the initiative) in the process that leads to a “change of mind” with understanding of what led to the wrong action in the first place. In a lot of situations with which we are familiar the only emotion that some experience is being sorry they got caught. If we apply the idea of understanding what causes that reaction, then we will find that the root of the problem is selfishness. Selfishness is just another name for a person having himself as his god. The message of the “Kingdom of God” starts with “Jehovah is God and you are not.”

Actually, when a person thinks that he or she is in control and “nobody is going to tell me what to do,” then that person has experienced the ultimate delusion. The source of that delusion is the devil. A common manipulation ploy that is used in controlling people is to plant an idea and then convince the person that he or she came up with that idea. That produces commitment and total buy-in to a philosophy or way of life. We need to carefully address issues to determine

if “our opinions” result from our own personal convictions, or do we simply adopt what someone else tells us and not invest the time and effort to search for the “truth” and then formulate a really independent and intelligent opinion.

In addition to the message, the pair of disciples was able to ministry deliverance and healing to people who needed help. As we read the account from Mark’s gospel, we notice how often reference is made to casting out demons or evil spirits. Was this was a more prevalent problem two thousand years ago or have we (in our sophistication) simply renamed the problem and fail to recognize what it is? Persons with addictions and compulsions and fits of rage as well as anything else that takes control of their lives may need deliverance rather than counseling.

Relative to the healing ministry, we see mentioned by Mark the practice of anointing people with oil as part of the procedure. Another mention of this practice associated with healing is in the epistle of James and Luke’s record of the Good Samaritan mentioned using wine and oil on a wound. Most commentators dismiss any “spiritual” significance to the process. It is a fact that there can be significant medicinal benefit to a person with certain skin conditions when something like olive oil is applied to the person. This was a common practice among the Jews of that day and people today are rediscovering the physical healing benefits of many essential oils when applied as topical ointments. All of us probably know someone who sells a variety of such oils and the message is that “it is beneficial for what ails you.” This type of healing is different from healing that is related to divine intervention such as what happened when Jesus healed the man with a withered hand and what happened several years later when Peter and John healed the lame man in the Temple.

Part of our ministry is to bring people to a realization that a decision is needed and to help direct them to Jesus as they decide. God will equip us with the tools to do the job just as Jesus equipped the disciples with power and authority over demons and sickness. Spiritual problems require spiritual solutions and all too often we resort to psychology and drugs to help people when what they really need is deliverance from demonic spirits. However, we live in a society that rejects the realities of the spiritual realm and, consequently, we do not have acceptance of all the help that God wants to provide for us.

We should be very thankful that God loves us enough that He does not give up on us when we reject Him. We should demonstrate that same kind of love toward others to not abandon people in their need when they reject us.

Resting with Jesus – 6:30-32

³⁰ The apostles gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught. ³¹ And He said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while.” (For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.) ³² They went away in the boat to a secluded place by themselves. Mark 6:30–32 (NASB95)

These verses give confirmation of the success the disciple pairs had as they went to various villages and towns. We are not told the details of what they reported to Jesus when they came together. It is likely that when they heard the reports from the other disciples that all of them were encouraged.

After having had what might be called a mountaintop experience, it is good to have a time of reflection and put everything into a proper perspective. People can get themselves into physical and emotional overload conditions and Jesus was aware of this when He and they left for a secluded place to rest. When the word got out that people were being healed and delivered that prompted even more people to come looking for Jesus and His disciples. Again we see a comment from Mark that it was so hectic that they did not have time to eat.

Maybe we could learn from their experience. When our ministry is actually helping people and they recognize that the source is from God, they will seek us out and be open to receiving God's gifts of grace. We also need to realize that some will seek help from totally selfish motives and not be open to the message of the need for repentance. However, the opportunities to help people with physical, emotional, and spiritual needs may start with simply "planting a seed."