

Town to Town Multiplication: Mark 6:7-13
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Last Sunday we saw that Jesus was rejected in His own hometown. The very people He grew up with, those who were closest to Him humanly speaking, they took offense at Him. They did not honor Him. Their response was that of unbelief. Verses 1-6 of Mark 6 told of hometown rejection. In our passage for this morning, verses 7-13, we're going to see town to town multiplication. Jesus is going to multiply His ministry by sending out the twelve. The disciples were with Jesus in Nazareth, and they observed how He was rejected there. And now Jesus sends them out into the towns, and in many of those towns they will experience the same thing Jesus experienced in Nazareth. They will be rejected, too, in many places. This is discipleship. This is how Jesus is preparing the twelve for the mission He is going to give to them.

The Primacy of Teaching

The closing statement in verse 6 is another reminder to us that the focus of Jesus' ministry was teaching. He did a lot of miracles, and the people were amazed by His miracles. But the emphasis was on the teaching. The miracles were not the main thing. The teaching and preaching was the main thing. As He said to the disciples in 1:38, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out." There was a continual emphasis on teaching. Everywhere He went, this is what He did. His ministry involved both word and deed. He taught the people, and He healed the people. He preached to them, and He cast out demons. This was the pattern of His ministry. And we need to remember that. We need to see that balance of word and deed, with the deeds being subordinate to and affirming of the word. The focus is on the word. The focus is on the proclamation of the gospel, that "the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (1:15).

Let this be a reminder to us of the importance of teaching and preaching. Many people tire of teaching and being taught. And we will sometimes tire of teaching and being taught. But we need to remember the vital importance of the Word. We need to uphold the value of propositional truth. Christian ministry is not just about doing. It's about laboring in the preaching and teaching of the Gospel. Word and deed. I'm not saying that we are to focus on the Word to the exclusion of deeds. But the deeds should flow out of and point back to the Word. It's so easy for deeds to replace the Word and minimize the Word. Various ministries and

activities and programs, as good as they may be, can easily become the main focus of the church. Let's make sure that we keep the Word at the very center of everything we do. It was the focus of Jesus' earthly ministry. It should be the focus of what we are doing as well.

In this passage Jesus sends out the twelve to do the same things He has done. They proclaimed that people should repent, and they cast out demons and healed people. And in the parallels in both Matthew and Luke, it mentions both the miraculous deeds and the proclamation of the kingdom. And at the conclusion of this story in Mark 6, it says in verse 30, "The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught." This is another instance where Mark tells the beginning of a story, inserts another story, and then concludes the first story. It starts with the sending out of the twelve, and then there's the account of John's death, and then verse 30 concludes the story of the disciples' mission. They had been sent out, and then at some later point they returned. And you can see clearly there in verse 30 that it was a ministry of both deeds and word. They told Jesus about "all that they had done and taught." Their ministry was modeled after Jesus' ministry.

Sending Out the Unqualified

Now, we have to ask a question here at the outset. The question is: What was Jesus thinking sending these guys out to represent Him? Think back with me to some of the recent behavior of these disciples. In the middle of the storm they spoke rudely to Him, saying, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" (4:38). And Jesus chastised them for their unbelief (4:40). Then, on the way to Jairus's house, Jesus stopped to ask who had touched His garments, and the disciples spoke to Him rudely again, "You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, 'Who touched me?'" (5:31). These guys aren't anywhere near ready to be sent out as representatives of Jesus! At least that's what we would say. And then we have to look in the mirror and say the same thing about ourselves. Wow, with all of my rough edges, with all of my unbelief, with all the struggles I have, how could Jesus ever use me to do anything good for the kingdom?

Here's the encouragement for us, brothers and sisters: Jesus doesn't seek out those who have it all together, those who are totally prepared and equipped, and then send them out to accomplish His purposes. He wouldn't get as much glory that way. What He does instead is seek out those who have nothing going for them, those who are unprepared and ill-equipped, and He enables them by His power to do what He calls them to do. As I've heard it said, He doesn't call those who are equipped. He

equips those whom He calls. That's certainly the situation with the twelve. And it's the case with us as well.

The twelve disciples were not the kind of men anyone would have expected a great spiritual leader to choose. These guys were not part of the religious establishment. They didn't have any credentials. They were not trained. They were not educated. They were not intellectuals. They were not leaders. They were not the kind of people you would expect Jesus to pick. But these are the ones He chose. These are the ones He called effectually. These are the ones He made to be apostles. In 3:13 it says that Jesus "went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him." It was an effectual call. And now we see that the purpose of the calling is to send them out. He calls, and He sends.

How did God call you? If you're a believer, you can look back over the course of your life and reflect on how God has worked in your life, how He has drawn you to Himself so that you are walking in repentance and faith. Maybe God used a relative or a close friend to point you to Christ. Maybe you started reading the Bible and God opened the eyes of your heart. Maybe it was in a Sunday School class or in corporate worship services that God began to soften your heart. If you're a Christian, it's because God sovereignly called you to Himself.

The next question is: What is He sending you out to do? He calls, and then He sends. What is the mission He has assigned to you? What are the ministries He has impressed upon your heart? What passions has He placed on your heart? As you look at our church and as you look at your community and this city, what are the things that you say, "You know, someone should really do _____." Whatever you fill in that blank could very well be the kind of thing that God wants you to initiate. That could be one of the things He is sending you out to do.

He doesn't call us to Himself in order that we just sit in a pew once a week. He calls us in order to send us out. Ephesians 2:8-10 states the same principle. "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. [That's our salvation. He saves us by grace through faith. We don't save ourselves; it's all of Him.] For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." He doesn't save us so that we can just sit back and get comfortable with our fire insurance. I've got my "get out of hell" card, and I can coast through the rest of my life. That's not how it is. He has stuff for us to do. And we need to get after those things. We need to be praying for guidance, seeking

council, and stepping out in faith to pursue those things that God is sending us out to do.

Some things are simple. If you're married, you're to be a godly husband or wife. If you have children, then you are to be a godly parent. If you're a child, you are to be obedient to your parents. If you are an employee, you are to be a hard worker, a dependable worker, a cheerful worker. And then beyond those things, think and pray and search your heart to discern some specific ministries that God would have you get involved in. He has called you for a purpose. He has called you in order to send you out in some way.

Sending out the Twelve

Now let's look at how Jesus sends out the twelve apostles in this passage. We see that He calls them and sends them out. In 3:14-15 where Jesus called the twelve and made them to be apostles, the purpose is stated like this: "And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons." They were to be with Him. That's what we've seen so far in Jesus' ministry. The twelve have been with Him, listening to what He has said, watching what He has done, asking Him questions, hearing not only the parables but also the explanations to the parables, witnessing miraculous things like the calming of the storm and the raising of the dead. The twelve have been with Him. And now Jesus sends them out. And just as it said there in chapter 3, He is sending them out to preach and to have authority to cast out demons. We'll see those things again here in chapter 6.

To guide our thinking as we study these verses, let's consider four aspects of how Jesus sends out the twelve. First, there is miraculous power. Second, there are limited provisions. Third, they will encounter acceptance and rejection. Fourth, there is Gospel proclamation. And with each of these we'll think about the implications for us, today. Our situation is not identical to the situation the apostles were in, and yet there is still a lot that carries over into our lives and our experience as Jesus' disciples.

1) Miraculous Power

First of all, He gives them miraculous power. It says in verse 7 that He "gave them authority over the unclean spirits." And then verse 13 says that, indeed, this is what happened. The authority that Jesus gave them was effective. "And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them." There was miraculous power that Jesus bestowed on these apostles so that they could go out and do the very things that Jesus had been doing. They were going out as His

representatives, and Jesus granted to them to exercise the same kind of supernatural authority.

Anointing with oil is mentioned in the New Testament only here and in James 5:14, where the sick person is to call for the elders of the church, and the elders are to pray over the sick person, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. I think the best way to interpret the use of oil is to understand its symbolic use in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament anointing with oil was used as a way of indicating that a person or thing was being set apart for God. In Exodus 40, for example, there are instructions to anoint with oil everything in the tabernacle and also to anoint with oil all of the priests. The purpose was to set them apart for God's special use, and the anointing with oil was a vivid way of demonstrating that. This seems to be the general meaning in James 5, and also in Mark 6. The anointing signified that the person was being set apart for God's special healing care.

What was the purpose of these miraculous powers? Why did Jesus do these amazing things, and why did He send His disciples out to do the same? In John 11, where Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, He prays to the Father right before He calls Lazarus out of the tomb. He says, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me." (John 11:41-42, ESV) We see there that Jesus' purpose for that astounding miracle was that the people might believe that He was truly sent from God. Jesus spoke with authority. He taught with authority. And the authority He exercised over demons and disease and even death showed that His words were true. The teaching and preaching was primary, and the miraculous power served to confirm the veracity of His words.

Notice also the kinds of miraculous things He did, and the miraculous things He instructed His disciples to do. It wasn't just any kind of random miracle. Not any miracle would do. Not any miracle would fit with the nature of Jesus' ministry. We don't see Him blowing up buildings or causing donkeys to appear in random places. It wasn't a magic show. The crowds may have perceived it kind of like a magic show, but Jesus' intent was to show His power *in a particular way*. And thus we see Him performing miracles of mercy. The miracles of Jesus' ministry, and the miracles He commissions His disciples to do, are miracles that demonstrate His mercy and compassion for those who are hurting and needy and oppressed. These miracles show that the Kingdom of God is breaking into history, and it is breaking in with merciful power. So the same kinds of things Jesus did, He sent the twelve out to do. Casting out demons and healing the sick.

Now the question comes to our minds: Should we expect to do the same kinds of things the apostles did? That's a controversial question, and I don't plan to tackle that whole debate this morning. But I will say a few things. I don't think we can expect that God is going to use us in exactly the same ways He used the apostles. The time that Jesus was on earth, and the decades that followed was a unique time in many ways. There seems to have been an unusual concentration of miracles during that time, attesting to Jesus' message and then as that message went out through the apostles. On the other hand, I'm not prepared to say that these miraculous gifts have totally ceased since then. God may still choose to use His people in these kinds of ways. He may choose to do miraculous things through the prayers of His people.

So what are the implications for us, today? We are not apostles. But we are disciples. We are followers of Jesus, who have been called by Him and sent out by Him. Here's what I think we can draw out of this passage. The apostles cast out demons and healed people. To say it another way, and more generally: They confronted the forces of evil, and they demonstrated Jesus' compassion and mercy upon those in need. And these things served to authenticate the message they were sharing. For us, whether or not God uses us to cast out demons and heal people, we should pray that God will use us to confront evil and demonstrate Jesus' compassion and mercy upon those in need. And we should pray that in these ways God will move mightily to authenticate the message that we proclaim. We don't know what this might look like. God can do as He pleases.

I just heard a man sharing his testimony the other night who said that his wife had become a Christian and was praying for him. He was obstinate and hard hearted. He didn't want to have anything to do with Christianity. And at the same time there were three men at work who started to have an impact on him. He noticed their integrity and their work ethic. He asked them, How is it that you always have your projects done on time, within the budget, and with no problems. And they said, Come to lunch on Tuesday and we'll tell you. He met them for lunch on Tuesday, and it was a Christian businessmen's meeting. Through the prayers of his wife, through the witness of these men's lives, and through the patient discipling of one of those men, God saved him. We should pray for those kinds of things to happen. It may or may not look like the kinds of things the apostles did, but we should yearn for God to authenticate the Gospel message as we preach it and live it out.

We should show compassion and mercy to those in need. We should seek to help with practical needs and pray for the

practical needs of unbelievers. We should pray that God will convict people of sin. We should pray that God will set people free from the oppression of false religions, that He will release people from bondage to pornography or other addictions, that He will restore relationships and bring peace where there is enmity. We should pray for healing and pray for miraculous provisions to be made for those who find themselves in desperate situations—not putting our hope in miracles, but hoping and praying that God will make His power known in whatever ways He sees fit. As disciples of Jesus, as those who are being sent out by Him, let's ask for God's power to confront evil and show the compassion of Jesus to a hurting world.

2) Limited Provisions

The second aspect of this commissioning has to do with what the apostles are supposed to take and what they're supposed to leave behind. Jesus sends them out with limited provisions. Verses 8-9 tell us that "He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belts— but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics." These are very limited provisions. They are more limited than they were used to even as they had been traveling around with Jesus. As they travelled together, there was a money bag, which Judas kept (John 12:6). And they used that money to buy food (John 4:8). And while they did accept the hospitality of others, it also seemed to be their custom to have bread with them on their travels. There's a reference to that in Mark 8:14.

It's also important to see that these instructions for limited provisions are not a permanent mandate upon the apostles. Later in His ministry, right before He is arrested, Jesus gives a very different set of instructions. This is found in Luke 22:35-36, and He begins by referring back to the short mission that we're reading about in Mark 6 (with parallels in Matthew 10 and Luke 9). "And he said to them, "When I sent you out with no moneybag or knapsack or sandals, did you lack anything?" They said, "Nothing." He said to them, "But now let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack. And let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one." In other words, I had a specific purpose for that previous mission. I wanted you to learn how to live by faith. I wanted you to learn to depend on Me. I wanted you to go out with limited provisions so that you could see very plainly and tangibly how I would provide for your needs. But now, I want you to go out well-prepared. I want you to have the provisions you need. I want you to accept these things that have been provided, and go out protected and prepared.

The limited provisions for this initial short mission was not to be the pattern for their life-long mission. But Jesus had a lesson for them to learn. He wanted them to experience total dependence. He wanted to force them to walk by faith. And as they looked back later, they could see that all their needs had been provided for. As they did the Lord's work, the Lord took care of all their needs.

Jesus had a lesson to teach the twelve during this season of ministry, and He has His ways of teaching us this lesson as well. It won't look the same in every situation, but God will bring us through times of limited provisions in order to make us depend more fully on Him. Stacy and I look back on our earliest years in ministry, and we marvel at how God provided for our needs. I was just entering into full-time vocational ministry, and I was still going to seminary, and Milaina had just been born, and we were committed to having Stacy quit her job and stay at home with our new baby. And it just didn't quite add up on paper. The budget didn't work. We prayed that we wouldn't have to take out loans for my seminary tuition. And, by God's grace, and His limited but miraculous provisions for us, our bills were always paid and the seminary tuition was always paid. I'll never forget the day when I got a call from the seminary saying that someone had anonymously paid my tuition for the coming semester. That's God's provision.

Here's how this applies to every one of us. What is God calling you to do? And are you scared of doing what He has called you to do because you can't see how He's going to provide for it? This is the life of faith, brothers and sisters. It's so hard, and it's so exciting. And we can be sure of this: When God calls us to do something, there will always be something about the mission that seems impossible to us. Would God do it any other way? Would He give us every provision up front, and make the mission entirely predictable, and explain every question, and erase every mystery? No, because then the mission wouldn't require any faith.

Some of you are holding on to too many securities. God is calling you to do something, and you're resisting because it just doesn't seem practical. We need to be ready to walk into the times of limited provisions. When we're called into a particular mission, we need to be ready to pursue that mission even when the provisions are uncertain.

As I say this I'm aware that we're probably all over the map on this. And so I encourage you to make these kinds of decisions in the context of the community of believers and with the counsel of godly friends. It may be that we think we're about to do something radical for Jesus, and really it's just foolish. And then there may be times when we think we're being responsible and practical, and really we're just scared to do what we know we're

supposed to do. So study the Word, pray, get wise counsel, and let's seek to live by faith in whatever we're called to do.

3) Acceptance and Rejection

The next thing Jesus discusses about the apostles' mission is the acceptance and rejection they will face as they go from town to town. In some places, they will be warmly received, and the disciples are to be good guests. Jesus tells them in verse 10, "Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you depart from there." That is to say, when they enter a town, they are to stay in one household until they leave that town. They shouldn't be hopping around from house to house, taking advantage of the people's hospitality. That's what false teachers would do. Paul warns against "those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions" (2 Timothy 3:6). The disciples must be careful that they are entirely above reproach and that this kind of thing is not even suspected of them. By entering a town and staying in one house for the duration of their stay there, they will show that their mission has to do with the Kingdom of God, not material gain. They are not being sent out to take advantage of these people, but to testify to them, in word and deed, that the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. And therefore, going right along with their limited provisions, they are to be content with whatever that one household provides for them.

In some places, however, there will not even be one household that will receive them. Verse 11, "And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." Just as Jesus was rejected in His own hometown, the disciples will experience similar rejection in many of the places they will go. This is the nature of the Kingdom of God. It breaks onto the scene of history in the person and work of Jesus Christ, and yet there is a mixture of acceptance and rejection. Some have ears to hear, but others remain hardened.

In the case of rejection, the apostles are to shake off the dust from their feet when they leave. The symbolism of this act would have communicated a clear message to those who saw it. When Jews travelled to pagan lands, they would shake the dust off their feet when they returned to Israel. They didn't want to tarnish the Holy Land in any way. For the disciples, this became the way for them to pronounce judgment upon those who rejected Jesus. It was a testimony against them. They were saying, essentially, that those who rejected Jesus' message were like pagans. They were like godless Gentiles.¹

¹ For similar actions, see Nehemiah 5:13; Acts 13:51, 18:6.

We, too, need to be ready to be rejected. And here's how we can tell if we're prepared for rejection. When we're rejected, do we pack up and go home? Do we quit? Or do we shake off our sandals and head right to the next town? Do we begin looking for the next opportunity to share the Gospel? This also teaches us that we need to preach judgment as well as grace. When people reject Jesus, they need to understand the weight of that. We can't just say, "Oh, well, I guess we have different opinions on religion." We need to say gently and lovingly and firmly that Jesus is the way and the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father except through Him, and that those who reject Him will be punished forever in hell. That's the gravity of this!

4) Gospel Proclamation

Finally, the fourth aspect of their mission, and the most important, and the part that most directly applies to all disciples at all times and all places, is gospel proclamation. Verse 12, "So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent." They went out, as Jesus did, proclaiming the Gospel. Jesus was proclaiming the gospel of God, saying, "The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (1:14-15). That's what Jesus preached. That's what the apostles preached. That's what Jesus' disciples have been proclaiming down through the centuries. And this is where we find ourselves now. Will we succumb to the pressures of our age? Will we adjust the Gospel, soften the Gospel, relativize the Gospel, compromise the Gospel? Or will we proclaim the Gospel in all of its fullness, both judgment and grace, sin and salvation, repentance and faith? Will we proclaim it with our lives and with our words, both written words and spoken words—in letters and emails and blogs and sermons and Sunday School classes and in conversations at work and at home and on the bus and plane, with strangers and friends and family?

However you may be struggling to discern God's will in your life, this is one thing that is clear. He has called you to Himself in order to send you out to proclaim the Gospel. We are His disciples, and we are to announce the same message He announced. We must call people to repent of their sins and trust in Jesus. And for those who do repent and believe, there is forgiveness of sin and the promise of eternal life. It is the best news in the universe, and it's the only news that can bring eternal hope.

I want to encourage all of you, as a very practical application of this point, to join us this coming Saturday morning, for an evangelistic outreach to this neighborhood. We want to do the very things we've been seeing in this passage. We're going to

distribute bags of information about the church, including a prayer request card. We want to let people know that we care about them and want to pray for them and that we would love for them to come to Three Rivers Grace and hear more about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Lord willing, we will have the chance to speak with folks about the Gospel and tell them about our church and personally invite them to join us. So please be praying about this outreach, and please come and participate.

There's nothing more exhilarating in life than to know that we've been called by Jesus and are being sent out by Him with a mission. And the mission is to proclaim the Gospel and show the love of Christ to a hurting world.