

'And the Apostles Gather Themselves Together Unto Jesus' Mar 6:30-32

by G. Campbell Morgan

The sermon explores the first apostolic mission, its inspiration, nature, and effect, as well as Jesus' response to the apostles' return and their subsequent rest and relaxation.

Scripture: Matthew 9:36, Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 6:7-56, Luke 10:1

Topics: "Compassion Of Christ", "Apostolic Mission"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan reflects on the conclusion of the apostles' first mission, emphasizing the importance of their gathering with Jesus to report their experiences. He notes that while the details of their mission are not recorded, the essence of their work was to preach repentance and spread the knowledge of Jesus' name. Morgan highlights Jesus' understanding and compassion for His disciples, inviting them to rest after their labors, and contrasts this with the ongoing needs of the crowds. The sermon underscores the apostles' growth in faith and their struggles to comprehend Jesus' miracles, ultimately pointing to God's grace in using imperfect vessels for His purpose.

Transcript

Mar 6:7-56.

IN these words we have the account of how the first apostolic mission ended. They constitute the minutes of a meeting for report and review, most probably held in the month of April.

The story of this first mission of the twelve is told by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, in each case with arresting and notable brevity. Mark and Luke each give a clear and concise statement of the facts, while Matthew gives some particulars.

It is at once an interesting and important story. Its brevity is part of its value. There can be no better vantage ground for considering the story, than this report of the gathering which followed the mission.

According to His appointment, these men had been with Him for a period of training, at least about a year. From that moment when from among the number of His disciples He selected twelve, and appointed them to be with Him in order that ultimately He might send them forth to preach and to cast out demons, that period had passed. During that time they knew that they were being prepared to be sent away from Him to

do His work. They had been observing Him at His work, and listening to His words. In that period they had seen His power manifested in every department of human life. They had observed the wonderful ease with which He had healed physical infirmity, the majesty with which He had cast out demons; in full and final authority, they had watched His working in the spiritual realm, forgiving sin, and bringing peace to the conscience. They had finally seen Him unable to do anything, His power paralyzed; He could do no mighty works in Nazareth because of their unbelief.

Then the hour had arrived when He had sent them forth, the men who had been with Him so constantly; sent them away to be His representatives, to say the things He had Himself been saying, to do the things He had Himself been doing. On their return this gathering was held. Let us then consider the report of the apostles; the response of the Lord; and then look at the things immediately following, as recorded in this chapter.

First, with regard to the report of the apostles, note that it is not printed. There is no account of anything they did in detail, no mention of any place to which they went definitely, no record of any discourse that either of their number delivered, no story of any interesting incident. That is the first arresting fact.

Yet the essential things are revealed. The story begins in the sixth chapter of Mark, at verse seven, immediately after a declaration which in the arrangement of the Revised Version is put with singular aptness, quite alone. Verse six is divided, almost strangely divided, and yet very properly so. The last part of the verse reads thus, "And He went round about the villages teaching." This immediately followed His rejection at Nazareth. It is a lonely little paragraph, hardly a paragraph, a sentence merely. For the illumination of that sentence we need the longer paragraph and more detailed declaration which is found in the Gospel of Matthew at the close of the ninth chapter, where Matthew also draws attention, not to any one particular occasion, but to the general ministry of our Lord, to that itinerating ministry which Mark dismisses in this brief sentence. Matthew declares in that paragraph that He went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, healing all manner of diseases; and that when He saw the multitudes He was moved with compassion for them, for they were as sheep not having a shepherd, distressed and scattered. In that declaration of Mark, so briefly made, without note or comment or explanation, in the light of the fuller declaration of Matthew, we have discovered the inspiration of the apostolic mission. It was that of the King's compassion for His people. He saw them as sheep without a shepherd, that is as a mob, disorganized, lacking the true principle of government; for the shepherd figure in Biblical literature, and in all Eastern literature, is the true figure of the kingly position. Here the King, rejected of His own, is seen moving through the villages and cities, and moved with compassion for the people as He saw them, distressed, scattered sheep without a shepherd, a people without the true central authority which is based upon love, expressing itself in righteousness.

That was the inspiration of the apostolic mission. It was as the result of this seeing of the people that Jesus called the twelve whom He had been preparing, and immediately enlarged the sphere and scope of His own ministry, by calling them to share His ministry and His power. Our Lord was labouring under limited and straitened circumstances; and in order that more of the villages might be reached, that more of the folk of the cities might hear the message; that the proclamation of the Kingdom-with its exhibition of power in the wonders wrought, in the exorcising of demons, in the healing of the sick-might have a wider area. He sent these twelve men out.

We also have here a revelation of the nature of their mission. There are distinct differences between their mission and ours. There are also fundamental similarities. In their case the mission was limited, and their

material equipment was a limited one. Later on our Lord changed that entirely. The instructions given to them here regarding hospitality were instructions that marked the transitory nature of their stay at a place, and the necessity for pressing on quickly that ground might be covered. Also they were strictly charged, as Matthew tells us, not to go to the Gentiles, nor to enter into any city of the Samaritans. They were limited to the house of Israel. These are things in which this particular mission differed from that which is now the full mission of the Church.

But the mission upon which these men were sent was a most important one. They went in His name; thus they were apostles now who never had been before. They had been disciples, but now they became apostles, men sent in His name, to represent Him, having entered into the fellowship of His authority because they had His message, and because they had the power that He had given them to do His works. They were sent forth with a definite message, "the Kingdom of heaven is at hand." They had given to them, special powers over the underworld of evil for the casting out of demons, and to heal the sick.

These men were sent out two by two. Our Lord never sent any man alone to a difficult sphere of work. We have often done so, and do it yet, and in that way wander from a fundamental principle. We will presently glance back at Matthew's Gospel, and see the couples as they went on that first missionary journey, a passage full of light and suggestiveness.

What do we know of their work? No place is indicated, no journey described, no discourse recorded, no special day referred to, no interesting incident recounted. But we are told certain things.

First they preached that men should repent. That is a declaration that needs careful consideration. It does not mean that they told men to repent, but that they preached in such a way as to produce repentance. While this is a brief sentence, how much there is suggested by it, of personal conviction, of earnest statement, of argument, of appeal. They so preached that men should repent

Their going was that of faith. They had nothing to prove to them that they possessed the power except the Lord's own word spoken, until they demonstrated their possession of it in the presence of demon-possessed men and women. A little later in His ministry, when He sent out the seventy, they came back amazed at the results themselves, and full of joy that "the demons are subject unto us." One cannot read this story without feeling that when first one of these twelve men stood confronted by a demon-possessed man, and commanded him to come out, it was a venture of faith.

One other thing is revealed here; the effect produced by their mission. The statement is a little involved, and the greater fact is declared in a secondary sentence. This is the summary of the whole effect that their mission produced: "His name had become known"; and as a result, "King Herod heard"! What then was the result of this first apostolic mission? The cumulative and sufficient answer will not take any count of the number of demons cast out, -there are no statistics; will not take any count of the number of people healed, there are no records; but the answer is this: "His name had become known." He was given a wider area through which He was known, a larger space in which He bulked, as the result of their work. Every evangelist gives as the central evidence of the spread of the fame of Jesus, that of the terror of Herod. With the story of Herod I am now not interested, save as it has a bearing upon this meditation. Here however are two evidences of the victory of the apostles; the first being that "His name had become known"; secondly, that the incarnation of all evil, vulgarity, and sin, trembled, even though he sat upon a throne. Such were the effects produced.

The second thing, to observe in the consideration of this report of the twelve is that they told the Lord all the things that they had done, and all the things that they had taught. Imagine those six reports, not written but spoken. Let us look at these couples as they were given by Matthew. Notice the grouping.

"Simon . . . and. Andrew his brother." Andrew was the first disciple of Jesus. Simon was his brother, whom he had brought to Christ. They had been somewhere working together; we do not know where.

"James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother." John had been with Andrew when Andrew first followed the Lord, and I think he went and found James. That is speculation, and may be dismissed. These brothers went together. What they did we do not know. I can believe they had some fiery times, these Boanerges men!

The next two; Philip, who was the first disciple whom. Jesus definitely called, and with him. Bartholomew. This man Philip went and found Nathanael. So Philip, the quiet man, always on the outskirts of the crowd, helpful, sympathetic toward the strangers, and Nathanael the guileless, went somewhere; we do not know where. I think their meetings were much quieter than those of the first and second couples.

"James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus." No one knows much about them. There are always two or three people in the Lord's elect company whom no one knows much about; but He knows all about them.

"Thomas, and Matthew." Thomas the sceptic, which simply means the man who looks at things from a distance, and investigates them. Matthew, the man whose business it was to keep accounts and give records. They went together, and I do not think that I could describe their meetings.

Then there were two others, "Simon the Cananesean," the Zealot, the member of a hot political party, and "Judas Iscariot." These were the couples.

Now they had all returned, and were giving in their reports, and they told Him all that they had done. There is no list of deeds, there is no schedule of results. They went over with Him the things they had said. They told all to the Lord from Whom they had received their message, from Whom they had derived their power, to Whom alone they were responsible. Those reports would probably be very varied. I am glad that they are not printed. We might have had a School adopting the methods of James and John, the School of Boanerges; and another adopting the methods of Philip and Nathanael, the School of the quiet men; and so on. In the telling of everything to the Lord, and in His presence, they would discover the necessity for the man who goes about quietly, the Nathanael type of man; and the men who move like thunder-storms, James and John!

So we come to the second suggestion of the text, that namely of the response of the Lord. "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while." As we read the words we should be careful lest we rob them of all their beauty by wholly spiritualizing them. Of course they have spiritual significance and intention. But to interpret them in the true sense, we need to go back in imagination, and look at the scene. Look into the face of Jesus, into those wonderful eyes that we have never seen with eyes of sense, but yet know so much about, those eyes which are always looking. The New Testament is full of the seeing and the looking of Jesus. He looked upon these men and listened to them. He noted the fact of their physical weariness, and began there. "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while"; and we will not go anywhere, where we have to walk; let us get into the boat, and go over the sea. So they went. The rest was mental; no teaching for a little while and no thinking. The rest was spiritual; no conflict with the underworld of evil for a while, and no praying for a little.

What were the conditions? They were to go with Him. They were to go themselves. They were to go apart. They were to go to the desert place. What a revelation is this of the understandingness of Jesus. What a revelation it is of the tender character of Jesus. Some people do not understand this, because they are well and strong, and are fit and eager for service. There are men and women who understand! He knew that these men were tired, and He said, Come and rest a while. Never mind any more journeyings for a little time. Do not think; do not pray for a little time. Rest!

If the story is a revelation of His understandingness, of His care, I go further and say it is a stupendous revelation of His wisdom. It is a rebuking revelation to some of us. Recently I came across this little paragraph from Amiel:

"We must know how to put occupation aside, which does not mean that we must be idle. In an inaction which is meditative and attentive the wrinkles of the soul are smoothed away. The soul itself spreads, unfolds, and springs afresh; and, like the trodden grass of the roadside or the bruised leaf of a plant, repairs its injuries, becomes new, spontaneous, true, and original."

So Jesus said to these men: "Come ye yourselves apart, and rest a while." Did they rest? The first thing was the boat, and a short voyage and not in a modern Atlantic liner! It was a voyage to Eastern Bethsaida; for there are two places of that name, one in the northeast, to which they went; and the other on the western shore of the lake. It was a voyage of tea or twelve miles of quietness and bodily rest.

But when they came to the desert place crowds were waiting. Then Mark records that He, the King Who had sent them forth, and Who having received them and their report, had called them to rest, was moved with compassion for that waiting crowd; because they were as sheep having no shepherd. The inspiration that had sent them forth was still burning within the heart of the King, and He gave Himself to teach the multitudes. The disciples did nothing. They were resting, as they watched Him, for Whom there was no rest, until He had accomplished His mission finally. They watched Him Who had to say in answer to criticism, "My Father worketh even until now, and I work." They watched Him give Himself once again with unstinted sacrifice to the crowds. But they were resting. Oh yes! they had their rest. I think I know enough of how they felt that day. It was a wonderfully restful time, such as that man, whose work is preaching, has, when he sits quietly down in some little village chapel, and listens to another man breaking the bread of life. No responsibility; just the quiet rest of it all. Oh yes! they had their rest. I have often said they had no rest; and thought they had not, until I began to look more carefully. They had their rest, but He did not. There was no resting time for Him during the days of His flesh.

But now glance at the two pictures which immediately follow; the story of the feeding of the five thousand, and the story of the storm.

When the day was far spent the crowds that Jesus had been teaching became a responsibility. The disciples said to Him, "Send them away, that they may go into the country and villages round about, and buy themselves somewhat to eat." That was the voice of the apostles. They said, "Send them away"; but Jesus said, "Give ye them to eat." Then the apostles spoke again, "Shall we go and buy two hundred shillings' worth of bread, and give them to eat?" It was the inquiry of protest. Jesus said, "How many loaves have ye?" They replied, "Five, and two fishes." And He said, "Bring them hither to Me." The results were that the multitudes were filled; and the disciples gathered up twelve basketfuls.

The story of the storm is one concerning these men, in the way of His will. He asked them to enter the boat, and cross back again to the other shore. They went. Remember that the way of His will was the way

of the storm. He sent them into the storm, and there is a strong word used here concerning that storm. We have translated it "distressed." Far more literally we may render, They were "tormented in rowing." Why did they not turn back to the other shore? The wind was contrary. There was the difficulty. The wind was blowing off the shore to which He had commanded them to go. It would have been the simplest thing to tack, to put about, and run before the wind. But no! they must not do that Why not? He sent them in that direction! They were tormented in the very path of obedience. But it was also the way of His power. He came after them. The wind was contrary to Him also, but did not hinder Him. The waters were storm-tossed for Him also, but they constituted the pavement of His victorious footsteps. When presently He was in the boat, the storm ceased.

Now look at the apostles, and mark the things that are said concerning them carefully. They were amazed. Why were they amazed? Mark says that it was because "They understood not concerning the loaves." These were apostles, not outsiders. Then why was it that they understood not concerning the loaves? Mark tells us that their heart was hardened; which means that they were dull, stupid, and therefore did not understand the miracle of the loaves, and consequently they were amazed at His mastery of the elements.

Now in all this my purpose has been that we should see the apostles. It was an interesting and revealing meeting when they told Him all they had done, and all they had taught; and the things following are equally interesting and revealing. So these were the apostles; these men, who when they had been on that mission and returned, could only say in the presence of the hungry crowd, Send them away to buy; these men, who when Jesus told them to do the most natural thing, and feed

them, argued, Shall we go and buy two hundred shillings' worth of bread; these men, who when He mastered the supernatural personally and for them, were amazed ; these men who did not understand; these men who were dull and stupid! These were the apostles. Thank God! I think I can pray now, and go on a little longer. They were His apostles. He chose them, and He makes no mistakes. Consequently what is the ultimate truth that breaks upon the soul after such a consideration? That in all our service we must say, "Not unto us, O Jehovah, not unto us, But unto Thy name give glory."

He chooses, Oh gracious thing! He equips, Oh most wondrous thing! He uses, Oh amazing thing! He gives rest, and He patiently bears with all inability to understand Him in the presence of the hungry multitude, and all the inability to understand Him when He masters the waves and the winds. Oh tender and beautiful thing!

My deliberate conclusion is that the report is hardly worth printing; and it never is! It would be well for us if we told the Lord more often what we do and teach; and told each other less often.

Source:

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