

The Twelve Apostles Commissioned

by John F. Walvoord

John F. Walvoord's sermon explores the commissioning of the twelve apostles, their mission to Israel, and the challenges of discipleship.

Scripture: Matthew 10:1-34

Topics: "Apostles Commissioned", "Cost Of Discipleship"

Description

John F. Walvoord preaches on the commissioning of the twelve apostles by Christ, highlighting their authority to cast out unclean spirits and heal diseases. The apostles were sent specifically to the lost sheep of Israel, with instructions to rely on God for provision and to shake off unwelcoming places. Jesus forewarns the disciples of persecution and division, emphasizing the cost of discipleship and the need to prioritize loyalty to Him above all else, even family. Despite the challenges, Jesus assures His followers of God's care and the rewards of confessing Him before others.

Transcript

Twelve Apostles Named and Given Authority, 10:1-6

In connection with Christ's commissioning the twelve disciples to preach, accompanied by power to cast out unclean spirits and to heal disease, Matthew names the twelve apostles in pairs (cf. Mk 3:16-19; Lk 6:13-16; Ac 1:13), unlike the other gospels, possibly indicating that they were sent forth in pairs⁵⁴ (cf. Mk 6:7). There are small variations in order and in the names given to the disciples in each of the gospels. Only Matthew describes himself as a tax collector, and there are variations in the name of Lebbaeus, surnamed Thaddaeus, whom Luke calls Judas, the brother of James, to distinguish him from Judas Iscariot. Those named as apostles are commissioned and sent forth to perform a ministry on behalf of God.

Apostles Sent Only to Israel, 10:6-23

The discourse in which Christ commissions the twelve has been considered by some interpreters as a collection of sayings spoken by Christ on many different occasions. As presented by Matthew, however, it is represented as a single discourse, and there is no valid reason for questioning this presentation. Obviously, Christ repeated many of His instructions at different times and in different places, and that there should be similarity to some statements here is not surprising.

The instruction given by Christ to the twelve was to go "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," and not go to the Gentiles or the Samaritans (cf. Mk 6:7-13; Lk 9:1-6). His first and primary obligation was to deliver the message of the kingdom to Israel, and neither time nor personnel would permit reaching the others. Later, the gospel was to go to every creature. The apostles were given authority to perform miracles, even to raising the dead. While they seem to have been successful in casting out demons and curing all diseases, there is no record that any dead were raised at this time.

Luke records a sending out of seventy disciples, apparently subsequent to the sending of the twelve, or in addition to them (Lk 10:1). The seventy also report success in casting out demons (v. 17). Matthew does not refer to the seventy, but their instructions were similar to those given to the twelve.

In sending them forth, Jesus instructed them not to take provisions of money or clothing and to depend upon the cities in which they preached to provide for them. If they were not welcomed in a particular place, they were to shake off the dust of their feet against it and to pronounce a solemn judgment that it would be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.

The disciples' task was to be a difficult one, as they would be as sheep in the midst of wolves, but their demeanor should be that of being wise as serpents and harmless as doves. They were to beware of men who might deliver them to the Sanhedrin, but if they were brought before governors and kings, they were not to be filled with care but to rely on God to enable them to speak in that hour. Jesus predicted that ultimately there would be persecution, with brother delivering brother to death, father the child, and children their parents, and they would be hated of all men. It is apparent that these prophecies go beyond their immediate experience and were to be fulfilled after Pentecost. Jesus declared they would not be able to fulfill their tasks of reaching all the cities of Israel until the Son of man had come. This seems to anticipate the second coming of Christ, and views the entire present church age as a parenthesis not taken into consideration in this prophecy.

Cost and Reward of Discipleship, 10:24-42

Continuing His instructions to the twelve, beginning in Matthew 10:24, Jesus discussed the whole matter of discipleship and its reward, including material that extended far beyond the disciples' immediate situation. Having introduced the thought that discipleship extends until the Son of man returns, He gave instructions covering the whole period. Jesus reminded them that if He, their Master, was called Beelzebub, it is understandable that men would similarly abuse His followers. Beelzebub was the name of a god of the Philistines (2 Ki 1:2), also known as Baal, which the Jews equated with the devil, or Satan.

Jesus instructed His disciples not to fear name-calling. The time would come when truth would be fully revealed and darkness and unbelief condemned. They were not to fear those who could kill the body but not kill the soul, but rather fear the one able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Although God alone has the power of death, the reference here is to Satan, whose activities ultimately result in the destruction of both soul and body.

The disciples were assured of the care of the Father. If two sparrows were worth a farthing, or one-fourth of a cent (equal to about twenty-five cents today), and a sparrow could not fall to the ground without the Father's permission, they could be assured that they were more valuable than many sparrows and that the very hairs of their head were numbered. Jesus promised them that if they confess Him before men, He will confess them before God the Father; but if they deny Him, they will be denied before God the Father.

Jesus told them bluntly, however, that His purpose was not to bring peace on earth, but rather a sword. A son would be set against his father, a daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's foes would be those of his own household.

In stating that He had not come to bring peace among men, Jesus was referring to His first coming and the result of the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom. He would be a divider of men. Ultimately, however, He was to bring peace and good will among men, as the angels announced at His birth (Lk 2:14). The Scriptures define many kinds of peace, such as peace with God (Ro 5:1), possessed by every Christian; the peace of God (Phil 4:7), which is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22); and the promise of peace on earth to be realized in the future millennial reign of Christ, as in Isaiah 11. The Scriptures make plain that there is no peace for the wicked (Is 57:21). Peace is only possible for those who are the recipients of the grace of God by faith.

Disciples accordingly must choose between love of Christ and of the family. Although normally, children should love their father and mother, they are not to love them more than they love Jesus. While parents should love their children, they should not love them more than they love Christ. A true disciple must take up his cross and follow after Jesus. In losing his life for Christ's sake, he shall find it. Not only disciples, but those who receive a disciple in Christ's name will receive their reward. Even a cup of cold water given in the name of a disciple will be rewarded in God's time. The words of Jesus, applicable to the twelve as they went forth, have echoed down through the centuries since, and have encouraged brave men and women to be true even unto death.

54 R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, p. 106.

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