
Day 304 - October 31

Jesus the Christ (5 BCE-30 CE)

Sending out the Apostles

Readings: *Matthew 9:35-38; 10:1-42; 11:1; 14:1-13; Mark 6:6-33; Luke 9:1-11*

Reflections:

- The opening passage in this section is rich. “Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.’” Here we see intentionality to communicate the message, demonstrate compassion and mobilize his community to reach even more people. We also see that Jesus doesn’t judge people for having messed up lives. Rather, he has compassion on those who are struggling, lost and broken. He wants to care for us and to create new ways for more and more people to encounter truth and experience grace.
- Jesus calls his twelve and then sends them out two by two with power to free and transform lives. We see modeled throughout Scripture that God often sends leaders in pairs. From Moses and Aaron to Paul and Barnabas or Aquila and Priscilla, God seems to always move away from the solo leader who does everything on his or her own. The wisdom of Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 fits here, “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” God is all about partnership and relationship. Also, it ensures that people always remember that there is only one true King, Lord and leader that we follow.
- In this first mission, Jesus sends the disciples to Israel. Later they will focus on the Gentiles. At first God wanted to make sure all of Israel had the chance to repent and respond. They are to do the very things Jesus was doing. They were also to live a life of faith, trusting God to provide for their physical needs through the generosity and hospitality of people. These were the years of popularity and so people were happy to have Jesus’ disciples come and stay with them. All of this would change in the future when people will turn against Jesus

and his message. Yet during this time they were to live open, generous lives as they proclaimed the message of the kingdom and demonstrated the power of God. If people did reject them, they were to shake the dust off. This was a symbolic act of separation, “You don’t want me then I don’t even want the dust of your town on my sandals.”

- Now Jesus realizes that although this is a season of popularity that his disciples still need to be careful. “Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.” The wolves are the religious leaders and they will in the future begin to persecute Jesus’ disciples. Although what is spoken here by Jesus does not happen immediately on this mission but it will happen in the future after Jesus’ resurrection. We see in the warnings that Jesus is looking forward to that time as he points out that they will speak before Governors and will go to the Gentiles. This is clearly fulfilled in the book of Acts as Paul and Barnabas take the message to the known world.
- Here Jesus encourages people again to trust God to give you the words through the work of the Holy Spirit. Rather than having a prepared script, God wants to teach us daily dependence even in the toughest times.
- “All people will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.” Here Jesus is not saying that nobody will die for in the verse before he is clear people will die. The person who stands firm even to the point of death will receive eternal salvation. This life is just the beginning.
- “When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another.” Jesus commands us to run away from persecution. This is not denying our faith but a God-given encouragement to save ourselves and those we love.
- “I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.” This is an interesting statement. It is hard to imagine that this coming of the Son of Man refers to his return at the end of time. It may refer to his return at 70 CE in the destruction of the Jerusalem and the temple. See Matthew 24 and particularly verse 24 for Jesus’ teaching about his coming at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.
- Jesus here again encourages the disciples to anticipate suffering and to trust God through suffering. If Jesus suffered, we will suffer. If God cares about the number of hairs on our heads, we can trust him with our lives. We don’t need to be afraid but keep our entire focus on simply trusting God’s provision and care, even through the passageway of death.
- Jesus continues to instruct his disciples with difficult teachings. Jesus again makes it clear that he has come to bring the sword of division. He didn’t come to bring the sword of war and killing but the sword that cuts and divides relationships. As he exposes people’s hearts, lines are drawn in the sand and people who love their own self-centeredness and self-righteousness will become defensive and divide from those who humbly decide to follow Christ. To follow Christ is to walk away from those who you are with in community. If they don’t follow too, you will be leaving them. We are then forced to make the choice, who do we love more? Jesus or our own family and friends? Jesus is just being upfront about the

very real cost of following him. Whether it is losing relationships or losing our life, Jesus calls us to follow him and his way of peace, grace and truth regardless of the cost. Only as we lose our life can we be free to truly live free of death or lose.

- Jesus here uses the image of taking up our cross to follow him. This will obviously mean much more at a later time but it was not lost on the disciples now. They had no doubt watched many revolutionaries carry their own crosses to their own executions. Jesus is not pulling any punches. He is telling them upfront that his revolution of peace could very well end in death.
- Jesus finally ends his instructions to them on a more positive note. Anyone who welcomes them or blesses them will be blessed by God. It is interesting he calls these disciples “little ones” to suggest that his servants are very child-like and humble in their dependence and need. God pour out his reward on any who help them or care for them. What a great promise to carry forward into our service to God.
- With these instructions, the disciples head out in pairs to proclaim the message and heal people. They heard the call and they responded. Will this generation of disciples be so proactive in simply going when Christ calls?
- Herod is curious about Jesus even as he was curious about John. The life of a ruler then could obviously be boring and so these kind of exceptional communicators obviously caught his interest. The story of John’s arrest and execution is sad and is reminiscent of many of the stories of the Israel in the Old Testament. Herod is without doubt viewed as a self-absorbed, somewhat paranoid, evil ruler. Sadly, John the Baptist’s life ends as a martyr. The first of many who will die for the truth during this time.
- Jesus ministry continues to grow and gain momentum. Jesus here has to intentionally set aside time to rest and be restored. “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” Jesus often retreated to solitary places for time with his Father and to rest. This is a good reminder for any who serve God and face an intense schedule of serving people. It is too easy to push hard without taking time to ensure we are well rested and centered. Again, Jesus is our model and the one we are called to emulate in all things.