

He Calls and Sends

Matt 9:35-10:8

Let us pray: Holy Spirit, illuminate our hearts so that we may receive today's word with faith. In the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.

Last month I traveled to Korea. I was born and raised there, so Korean ways of thinking and feeling are deeply a part of me. At the same time, because I live in the United States, I have been learning American ways of thinking, and I try to respect and live within the culture and customs here. Yet in our home, we still speak Korean, and often I talk on the phone with my sisters in Korea. In many ways, I live in two worlds.

Let me show you a few scenes from Korea, as some of our church members have asked to see them.

The Christian life is similar in that we also live between two worlds. Before we believed in Jesus, we belonged to this world. But after believing, we became people who belong to the kingdom of God. Our spirit has been made new, yet we still live in this world. The patterns and habits of the world that shaped us from childhood still influence us in ways we do not always recognize.

By the grace of God, when we came to faith, our spirit was born anew into the kingdom of God. But our soul and body do not immediately escape the influence of the world. We often feel the tension and even the pain of living between the world and the kingdom of God. This is why Paul urges us, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2, NIV).

When Jesus first called the twelve disciples, they knew nothing about the kingdom of God or the work of the Messiah. For three years, they listened to his words, received his teaching, and participated in his ministry. Through that journey, they came to believe and eventually confessed him as the Messiah. Yet their transformation was a long and difficult process. Their old ways of thinking, shaped by Judaism and life in the land of Israel, had to be broken and replaced with the values and mindset of the kingdom of heaven.

God desires that when we hear the gospel of the kingdom and become His people, we also begin to experience the culture of that kingdom. This is why Jesus "went through all the towns and villages ... proclaiming the good news of the kingdom" (v. 35). His coming meant that the kingdom of heaven had arrived. In the Gospel of Matthew, the kingdom is not primarily a place we go after we die. It means that through Christ, the rule and authority of God have come to this earth. As evidence of this, Jesus healed every disease and every sickness (v. 35).

Wherever Jesus went, he looked at the crowds and had compassion on them. The reason was that "they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (v. 36). Before we met Jesus, we were all like sheep without a shepherd. But when we encounter him, his life enters us and we are made alive in every

part of our being. Even now, the Lord looks upon those who do not yet know him with deep compassion. It is because of his mercy that we are saved.

Up to chapter 9, Jesus carried out the ministry of preaching the gospel, healing, and driving out demons by himself. The disciples only watched what their teacher was doing. Now, at the end of chapter 9, Jesus begins preparing them to step into real ministry. He says, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (vv. 37–38).

Before sending them out, Jesus connects the needs of the world with the mission of the disciples. This is not simply a prayer topic he is giving them. It is a calling. And the same calling comes to us who hear these words today. He is not selecting people based on qualifications. He is graciously calling us so that we may share in his glory.

Jesus said the harvest is plentiful. Who is the harvest? It is all those who are weary and troubled like sheep without a shepherd. And who is the Lord of the harvest? It is Jesus himself. As the Lord of the kingdom, he desires to gather a harvest into the storehouse of heaven. The disciples themselves were people whom Jesus had harvested. So are we. None of us ever prayed, "Lord, please send someone to harvest me." Yet he came to us, he gathered us, and he called us to be workers in his harvest. That is grace.

When we realize that we are people who have been harvested by him, our hearts begin to feel compassion for those who have not yet been gathered. And from that compassion grows a willingness to work for them.

When the Lord calls us to any work, he always calls us as the Master. Because he calls us as the Master, he takes responsibility for providing everything his workers need. This is why he gave his twelve disciples the authority required for the harvest. He gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. The disciples never asked for this. God is the One who gives generously.

Even though the forms of ministry may differ, every Christian is both someone who has been harvested and someone called to be a worker in the harvest. And for that work, we have received authority to cast out demons and to heal sickness as evidence that the kingdom of heaven has come. How is that possible? Because everyone who has received the Holy Spirit has Jesus living within them. Of course, the expression of spiritual gifts may differ, and training is needed. But Jesus said that every believer has overcome the world. Even a lion cub is still a lion.

After Jesus gave the disciples authority and sent them out, they were called "apostles." An apostle is someone who is sent. We are ambassadors of heaven who have been sent into various spheres of this world to represent Jesus.

When we look at the disciples, they were ordinary people. Even Judas Iscariot was included. Within us too is a sinful nature capable of betraying Jesus, yet the Lord takes that nature to the cross.

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Some of you may wonder, "I am sick and have many problems. How can I be a disciple or an apostle?" If you love the Lord and walk with him, you are a disciple and an apostle. Being sick does not mean you cannot pray for others or that you cannot be used to bring healing to someone else.

About sixteen hundred years ago, Augustine, one of the great fathers of the early church, became seriously ill near the end of his life. As an elderly man, he suffered from many ailments, and he was very close to being called home by God. But one day a sick man came to him asking for prayer. Augustine said, "I am sick myself. How can I pray for you?" Yet the man insisted that Augustine pray for him. So Augustine lifted his frail body and prayed for him. Not long after, that man received healing as a gift from God. This is the work of God, and this is the work of a disciple.

When Jesus sends his disciples out, he explains in detail how they can fulfill the ministry and remain safe. We did not read the entire chapter today, but all of Matthew 10 is his instruction. His words are not a command notice. They are a guide.

Yet many people do not listen carefully to his words. Some rush out too quickly, and others never go at all. They do not take the time to hear where he wants them to go or what he wants them to do. But when Jesus calls us, he gives us clear guidance. When we listen fully and then go, the work becomes easier, and we become confident. What we must always remember is that the one who carries out the ministry is not us. It is Jesus.

In verses 5 and 6, Jesus tells the disciples exactly where to go: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel." We should not misunderstand this as Jesus discriminating between Jews and Gentiles. In the book of Acts, he commands them to go to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Jesus always saw all people as the harvest. But at that moment, he was directing the disciples to begin with what they were ready for, in places they could go and with work that they could handle at their own level of maturity.

The verse that shows this ministry is not the disciples' work but the work of Jesus himself is the phrase "the lost sheep of Israel." From the disciples' point of view, nothing was "lost." This is God's perspective. And even then, it is not technically accurate to say that God "lost" them. Did God neglect Israel and misplace them? God has never lost anyone. People turned away from him and became separated from him. For God to call sinners "lost sheep" is an expression of his immense compassion.

In verses 7 and 8, Jesus teaches them the content of their ministry. First, he tells them to proclaim, "The kingdom of heaven has come near." They are to announce the same message Jesus preached at the beginning of his public ministry. Then second, he commands them to demonstrate the evidence that the kingdom has come. He says, "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give."

At this point in Matthew's Gospel, the disciples were not yet mature enough to teach, so Jesus entrusted them only with proclaiming the good news and exercising healing authority. Later, after Jesus went

through his death and resurrection, and just before he ascended, he added to them the authority to teach as well (Matthew 28:20).

The words "Freely you have received; freely give" are deeply comforting. The first reason is that everything Jesus gives us comes freely. The disciples did not fast for forty days or strive in order to receive authority. They simply followed Jesus, listened to his teaching about the kingdom, and watched him heal and cast out demons. They probably never imagined that they themselves would one day do the same. Of course, observing him was part of their apprenticeship. Because they were always near Jesus, the anointing on him was flowing to them. And it seems to me that just before he officially sent them out, he imparted his authority to them by proclaiming his word.

How do we stay close to Jesus today? Remain in the body of Christ. Stay in the places of worship, praise, prayer, and the reading and learning of Scripture. These are the places where we connect with the kingdom of heaven. Especially, fill the rooms of your heart with the Word by reading it often. As we read Scripture, the values of the kingdom enter us, and over time, those values form a kingdom mindset. When all of us live this way, a kingdom culture begins to form among us. I pray for the day when proclaiming the kingdom through healing and deliverance becomes natural in our church and in our homes.

The second comfort in the words "Freely you have received; freely give" is that this is not the worldly principle of supply diminishing when something is given away. It is the principle of being. When God gives us what he has, does his own possession decrease? Of course not. God in himself is already whole, abundant, perfect, and full. From that fullness of his own being, he gives himself to us. No matter how much he pours out on us, he never lacks anything.

Therefore, those who receive him and are filled with his fullness become his people and his children who understand the principles of God. As new creations, we go to others in order to freely give what we have freely received. And when we do that, we do not become depleted. In fact, the abundance of heaven increases in us. This kind of ministry is possible only when we understand that we are not giving out of our own resources, but bringing the resources of heaven to others.

Even when we serve in any area of life, if we believe that our strength and resources come not from ourselves but from heaven, the work becomes lighter and more joyful. Wherever we find ourselves, may we live as disciples and apostles who belong to heaven, drawing on the resources of the kingdom, demonstrating the rule of heaven, and gathering many into the harvest. Amen.

Let us pray: Father, we thank you for sending someone through Jesus to gather us into your harvest. Now raise us up as workers of the harvest. Grant us your authority and send us out. Open our eyes to see the resources of heaven, and through this amazing calling and provision you have given us, enable us to gather many into your harvest. In the name of Jesus Christ, the Lord of the harvest. Amen.