



April 17, 2016  
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## *The Story: No Ordinary Man* Matthew 10: 1-15

Four weeks ago I led a team of six from Chapel Hill to participate in what was the largest sustained outreach to the largest campus of the largest school in the US—Arizona State University. We joined with 18 campus ministries and churches, and with a team from Ravi Zacharias International Ministries (RZIM) to put on a week of events aimed at daring students to ask fearless questions about life, faith and God. We spent a lot of time out on the campus itself, engaging in conversation with students, daring them to ask their questions and inviting them to a series of events. Every lunch time we would have free lunch and two different talks tackling questions such as: 'Is the Bible sexist?' and 'What happens when we die?' And every night we had further talks asking more fearless questions. Every talk finished with a Q&A and discussion with the students and every student who requested it was followed up by a local Christian student or campus ministry worker. Over the course of the week we had around 15 students make a decision to follow Jesus in one-to-one conversations with our team and around 30 students check a box on a response card after a talk to say they had decided to follow Jesus. We'll be reporting on Sunday, May 22 over lunch if you want to hear more.

Perhaps my favorite story was on the first night. As the talk was beginning, a few of us were standing outside handing out flyers when a local pastor walked up. He gave us two boxes of chicken tenders and told us to give them away. Eric Engelland proceeded to walk right up to one male student named Tom and his female counterpart and offered them chicken tenders, no strings attached. Tom was totally taken aback and asked why? Eric said the chicken tenders were free, no strings attached, but if he wanted to hear a two-time Super Bowl winner, Jason Elam, talk about how faith changed his career. He could bring the chicken tenders with him and eat them while listening to the talk. Tom decided to come in. He listened to the talk and afterwards Eric and another team member sat and talked to him. Tom shared how he felt like his life was falling apart since he'd stopped playing sport at a high level. He felt totally lost. Eric pointed back to Jason Elam's talk, in which he said that Jesus provides us a secure identity, even when the things of this world change. Around an hour later, Eric led Tom in a prayer to commit his life to Jesus, and place his identity and trust in Him. All that from a box of chicken tenders...

This year we have been journeying through the Story—an abridged, chronological version of the Bible. Last week, our Senior Pastor Mark Toone told us all about the amazing nature of Jesus' early ministry. He showed us how in one chapter of Mark's gospel, Jesus teaches, heals and casts out demons in a way that truly causes us to

go, 'Wow!' Put yourself in the shoes of his disciples, his followers, for a second... Imagine traveling around with Jesus and seeing him do these amazing works of healing and deliverance. You'd be astounded... blown away. Now imagine that Jesus turns around to you and says: 'Now you try.' How would you feel? Scared? Overwhelmed? Intimidated? Well, that's exactly what Jesus does. Let's turn to Matthew 10: 1-15 and read what happens next in the Story.

'And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction. The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

'These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay. Acquire no gold or silver or copper for your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics or sandals or a staff, for the laborer deserves his food. And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart. As you enter the house, greet it. And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.'

(Matthew 10: 1–15 ESV)

I brought two high schoolers down to ASU with me—Eric Anderson and Drew Spitzer. I knew I was taking a big risk bringing high school students to engage in spiritual conversations with college students. But I'm sure I wasn't as nervous as they were. The thought of working alongside trained evangelists and apologists from RZIM, seeking to share about Jesus with college students and being themselves only 17 years old, I know was a daunting prospect. And yet, what Jesus does here with his disciples is remarkably similar...

The Bible doesn't tell us how old the twelve were, but we only know that one of them was married—Peter. Typically men got married around age 18 in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jewish culture, and therefore these disciples were probably the same age as our high school students. And at this point in the story, they've probably been with Jesus a matter of months if not weeks. And yet, Jesus turns around and says: okay, now you go and do it. Can you imagine how they felt? You know, it's one thing to watch a lame man being healed, it's another thing to stretch out your hand and

say: 'Be healed in Jesus' name!' And yet, that is what Jesus sent them out to do with his authority.

So Jesus sends his baby-faced disciples out on mission. I want us to see what we can learn from Jesus' instructions to his disciples and how they might apply to us today. There are three things I want us to look at: He gives them a specific people that he's sending them to, he gives them specific tasks to do, and he gives them a specific method to carrying them out.

First, he sends them to a specific people: the people of Israel. Verse 5 says: 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' This may strike us as a little closed-minded or bigoted. But the reality is, whenever you say 'yes' to one thing, you are saying 'no' to something else. This was a short term mission for Jesus' disciples, and they could only cover so much ground. Therefore, Jesus sent them to the people of Israel, people who he describes as 'lost sheep.' But most interestingly, they were the disciples' own people, the people they were a part of, the people they understood.

I wonder how many of us see Jesus' call to go and proclaim the good news about him as something that needs to be done overseas or at least as far away as Arizona? For so many of us, we think of missionaries as people sent far away to Africa or East Asia. When my wife, Rachel, and I first came to the US, we were on missionary visas. And I know for many of you here at Chapel Hill that was a bit of a paradigm shift: Missionaries to Gig Harbor? Yet, the truth is that every single one of Jesus' followers is a missionary. Every single one of you is a missionary to Gig Harbor. If you follow Jesus, you have been sent by him to tell people and show people right here in Gig Harbor that there is a kingdom beyond this world that is life-altering.

So, Jesus sends his disciples to a specific people, but he also sends them with specific tasks. Verse 7 says: 'Proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons.' Jesus says the disciples' mission is to be in both word and deed. He tells them to proclaim that God's kingdom is coming—that the place where God reigns is about to break in, that the place where there is freedom, healing, wholeness and restoration is right around the corner. And he tells them to physically demonstrate that the kingdom is breaking in right now: 'heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons.' Jesus tells them they must reach out their hand to the sick, the dead, the leper, the possessed, and they must pray in the name of Jesus that they might be healed.

One thing to note is that he doesn't tell them to go and teach. He saves that for later, at the very end of his time with the disciples, when he gives them his great commission. It's almost as if Jesus is saying: it doesn't matter at what stage of following me you are at, whether you have only just begun, or whether you've been following me for years, you have my authority to tell people about the good news

that my kingdom is breaking into this world, and to demonstrate through prayer this reality in people's lives. You don't need a seminary degree to do this, you don't need three years of training to do this, and you don't need to take a class to do this. Why? Because, you have my authority. That's what verse 1 says: '[Jesus] gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction.' We have that same authority by the power of Jesus' Holy Spirit living in us. That same Spirit that raised Jesus from the grave lives in us. (Romans 8:11) And as Jesus' followers, he has given that authority—that comes through His Holy Spirit—to us, and that is all we need to tell and demonstrate the reality of my kingdom breaking into this world.

So what would it look like? What would it look like to use that authority we've been given? I wonder, have you ever had a friend, or colleague, or neighbor, or family member tell you that they are sick? Or that they are struggling with something? Or that they have someone they are concerned about? I know I have. Well, have you ever asked them if you could pray for them right then? Because I tell you what, they are highly unlikely refuse. It might seem scary; I know it scares me every time I do it! But honestly, this is all Jesus told his disciples to do. He told them to go find the lost people, tell them there is a better way and that through prayer they can experience it, and then pray for them.

Can you imagine with me, what it would look like this week, if every single one of us in this room committed to ask one person: 'Can I pray for you, about that, right now?' And then prayed for them and followed up by asking them how it went. Can you imagine the impact that might have on this community? Can you imagine the ways we might see God's kingdom breaking in? Can you imagine the stories we'd have to tell? This is what Jesus was sending his disciples out with the authority to do. He wasn't sending them out to teach, or to give a five-point gospel presentation based upon the book of Romans. He sent them out to pray for people that they might see the kingdom of heaven breaking into their own lives, in the midst of their pain, in the midst of their sickness, that they might see for themselves that there is power in the name of Jesus.

So, Jesus sent his disciples to a specific people, with specific tasks, but he also gave them a specific method. He told them, don't take extra supplies for the journey, don't weigh yourselves down with baggage, but trust that God will provide. And he told them to find 'people of peace' as the similar passage in Luke 10 puts it; people who welcomed them, were open to conversation and served them.

I think so often we tell ourselves something like: I'm just not prepared enough to tell someone about Jesus. We feel like we need to know more, or read more, or listen to more talks or attend a class. But just like Jesus told his disciples not to take any extra supplies, so often this stuff can just be extra baggage to lug around that doesn't end up being useful. Now I'm not saying preparation isn't important, but I am saying that it isn't necessary for the mission Jesus has for each one of us. There is no seminary degree needed to say to a friend: 'Can I pray for you about

that right now?’ And then launch into a 10 second prayer in the name of Jesus. All you need is the authority Jesus has given you as his follower.

The five Chapel Hill members who came down to ASU with me felt unprepared. How do I know? Because they told me so, sometimes with a kind of ‘save me’-type look on their face. But what I kept reminding them was that no matter how much or how little training you have, we all have the same Holy Spirit in us. No matter if you’ve been following Jesus for years, or if you’ve only just started following Jesus, we all have the same Holy Spirit. And the reality is that when you get a whole bunch of training and teaching, it can be really tempting to rely upon that training, instead of upon the one who has power—the Spirit. That’s what Jesus was teaching his disciples here; don’t rely upon your supplies, but upon God’s provision in any and every moment.

The other thing he told them to do was find ‘people of peace.’ People who welcomed them, were open to conversation and served them. Now, 1st-century Israel was a very different culture than today. When a newcomer showed up in your town, it was expected that someone would take them in, feed them and give them a bed for the night. A little different from Gig Harbor today... But I think we can understand Jesus’ people of peace concept as it relates to our lives. We all know people—friends, co-workers, neighbors, family members—who, when it comes to spiritual matters, don’t just shut the conversation down... people who are peaceful when it comes to you mentioning church or faith. Jesus says: stick with those people. Jesus says to find those people and strengthen those relationships.

I think of a particular friend of mine in Oxford called Tom. He lived next door to me and was very open to talk about the deeper things of life like identity and security and where we place our hope. Several times he let me pray for him. Totally unlike his best friend John, who shut down any conversation about faith and changed the subject instantly. Tom was a person of peace, John wasn’t. I stuck with Tom, I spent time with him, I offered to pray for him. I didn’t for John. Not because I didn’t want the same things for John, but because the conversation wouldn’t go anywhere. I was still friends with John, but I didn’t devote as much time and energy to him as to Tom. We all know people of peace. Who are your people of peace? Stick with them. Get to know them. Take them out for coffee. Invite them over for dinner.

So we see Jesus sending his very young disciples out on a mission. He gives them a specific people—their own people, the people they knew well; he gives them specific tasks—to tell these people that there is a better way and they can experience it through prayer in the name of Jesus; and he gives them a specific method—don’t get weighed down with supplies, but trust me for provision, and find people of peace and stick with them. And I believe all those same things apply to us as followers of Jesus today as we go about our lives. We are sent to the people around us, we are sent to tell them there is a better way, and through prayer they can experience it, and we are sent not to rely on training but on God’s Spirit, and to

find those people of peace in our lives. But none of this gets at the reason why. Why did Jesus send them out? Why did Jesus even come to this world on his own mission?

Seven weeks ago my father passed away unexpectedly aged 59. He left for work one morning, and by the afternoon he was gone. He suffered a sudden cardiac arrest after finishing a walk with a work colleague. The last few weeks have been incredibly hard for me, but also incredibly important. When I was down in Arizona, one of the RZIM staff persons, Madeleine, said to me: 'I can't believe you are here so soon after what just happened.' In many ways it was a little crazy to lead that trip down to ASU, and it certainly pushed me to my visceral limits. But my response to Madeleine was this: 'There's no place I'd rather be.'

Life is fragile. Our days are numbered. And there are people out there who don't yet know the reality of God's kingdom breaking into their lives. Jesus has called us and has sent us to tell and to show the world that the kingdom of heaven is ready to break into their lives. But all of our days are numbered. That work colleague, or that friend, or that neighbor, or that family member, may not be here tomorrow. You may not be here tomorrow. If you follow Jesus, he has sent you to those people. If you don't follow Jesus, he longs for his kingdom to break into your life and then to send you to those people. And as long as I am breathing, my work is to tell others that God's kingdom is about to break in and transform their lives, if only they will let it. Will you join me?