Jesus Sends Out the Twelve

Mark 6:1-29

Key Verse 6:7 “Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits.”

Today’s passage contains three different parts, but we will find several common themes that we can apply to our lives and ministry.

First, spiritual ignorance (6:1-6) In the previous chapter, Jesus healed a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, and he raised Jairus’ little daughter from the dead. Now Jesus returned to his hometown, Nazareth, with his disciples. (1) As usual, Jesus began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. (2) They said, “**Where did this man get these things? What’s this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing? Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him**. (2-3) The townspeople were amazed by Jesus’ wisdom and his miraculous power. But soon their attitude toward Jesus turned hostile because they saw only the human side of Jesus. They remembered the childhood of Jesus and his siblings. Some of them might have played together with the little Jesus when they were young. Because they had prior knowledge about Jesus, they lost their respect for him. They were spiritually ignorant. Jesus has perfect humanity as the son of Joseph. He also has perfect divinity as the Son of God. In Luke’s gospel, the boy Jesus visited the temple in Jerusalem where he sat among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. To Joseph and Mary, who were earnestly searching for him, Jesus said, “*Why were you searching for me? Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?*” (Lk 2:49) Jesus’ human parents were not aware that he was the Son of God. When Jesus’ townspeople saw Jesus as the son of a carpenter, they took offense at him. (3) In church history, those who didn’t acknowledge the full divinity of Jesus have damaged pure gospel faith. Humanism, which prefers reason and experience to faith, and Liberalism, which denies the divinity of Christ, have mislead many Christians into confusion and apostacy. They turned the viewpoint of the Scripture from God-centered to human-centered. Some refused to believe all the miracles and signs in the Bible.

How did Jesus respond to the unbelief of his townspeople? Did he fight against them for his reputation or argue with them for persuasion? No! Look at verse 4. “Jesus said to them, “***A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home.***” There is saying, “Familiarity breeds contempt.” God’s servants are not recognized by their own family members and relatives. Verses 5 &6 say that Jesus didn’t do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. He was amazed at their lack of faith. The townspeople did not deserve Jesus’ favor because they were spiritually ignorant. Jesus did not perform miracles for those who would not appreciate and value the work of God. It reminds us of what Jesus said in Matthew 7:6, “*Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces*.” Do you know why dogs and pigs turn and attack you? This is because you didn’t give them food, but pearls, which are not necessary to them at all.

Second, Jesus sends out the Twelve. (6b-13) What did Jesus do next? Look at verses 6b-7. “***Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits.***” Jesus left his hometown and traveled around villages to teach. This is God’s wisdom. We don’t have to argue with those who are spiritually ignorant. We pray for them and wait until another opportune time comes. As we know, James and Judas, brothers of Jesus, later became leaders in the early church. Jesus called his Twelve and sent them out two by two with the authority to drive out demons and heal the sick. Jesus overcame the ignorant and hostile world by sending his disciples out into the world. Why two by two? This was to reinforce the truthfulness and credibility of his disciples’ testimonies. According to Jewish law, testimonies were proved by two or three witnesses. (Deut 17:6)

Jesus gave them special instructions. Look at verses 8-11. “***These were his instructions: “Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra shirt. Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, leave that place and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.***” In Matthew 10:1-42 Jesus gave them more detailed instructions, but we will study three main points from these instructions. First, depend on God alone for the trip. Why did Jesus ask his disciples not to take any food, money, and sleeping bags? He wanted his disciples to depend on God alone. My senior pastor once said, “If a man has even five dollars in his pocket, he depends on the money more than God.” When the Israelites were brought into the desert, they didn’t carry anything but their bodies. God helped them to depend on God alone in the desert when they had nothing. Jesus’ disciples learned how to depend on God, who will provide all necessary supplies, through prayer. Second, focus on your mission. The apostles might have been welcomed and treated well by the people who received healing from them. They might have been invited to this house and that house for dinner. But they had to stay in one house until they left the town. (Lk 10:7) According to Luke 10, Jesus instructed them not to even greet anyone on the road. (Lk 10:4) One missionary went out for fishing on campus. But she spent more than a hour only to greet someone she already knew. Jesus helped his disciples focus on their mission work. Third, have a sense of honor as apostles. Jesus asked them to bless the house with the greeting, “Peace be with you!” If they welcomed them, their peace would remain on that house. If any place did not welcome them or listen to them, the disciples were to leave that place and shake the dust off their feet as a testimony against them. (11) Shaking the dust off one’s feet was the Jewish custom for ceremonially cleansing when reentering Jewish land after traveling in gentile territory. They thought that the gentiles were unclean. There is more meaning here than just ceremonial cleansing. Jesus wanted the apostles to have a sense of honor as the servant of God. They don’t need to be afraid of people who reject them. They don’t have to be discouraged. This is because the apostles have the authority to give people a choice between eternal life and eternal condemnation. The apostles are responsible for preaching the good news, not for ensuring their salvation. It is up to their decision whether they believe it or not. Therefore, the apostles should have a sense of honor, not a sense of horror. We are the ambassadors of Christ, as Paul said. (2 Co 5:20)

How did the Twelve respond to Jesus’ calling? They obeyed Jesus’ words and went out. They preached to the people that they should repent. Their message should be the same as Jesus, “*The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news*!” (Mt 10:7, Mk 1:15) **They also drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them**. (13) Our spiritual direction and prayer topic is ARE, which means to advance the gospel, raise Jesus’ disciples, and expand God’s kingdom. Today we learn that this is not only for our church’s prayer topic and mission, but for Jesus’ disciples who respond to Jesus’ calling. Advancing the good news, raising Jesus’ disciples and sending them out for God’s kingdom is the answer for this generation and the solution for all problems, in and out, personally and globally. Amen!

Third, trust in God! (14-29) The death of John the Baptist, which is written in verses 14-29, shows the dark side of Jesus’ time under the reign of King Herod. Here, King Herod is Herod Antipas, the son of King Herod the Great, who took charge of Galilee and Parea. According to verse 20, King Herod feared John the Baptist and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. However, John rebuked Herod who had taken Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife. “It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.” (18) Herodias was an evil woman who nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. One day, she had a chance to remove John the Baptist. On Herod’s birthday, Herodias let her daughter Salome dance before Herod to please him. Herod, who was captivated by her dance, promised Salome to give whatever she wanted. She asked her mother, Herodias, who coached her to demand the head of John the Baptist. King Herod couldn’t refuse her request because he had made an oath in public. Finally, John the Baptist, who was imprisoned, was beheaded.

When we hear this story, we become upset, because injustice and immorality seem to rule over righteousness and truth. We wonder why and how a righteous person like John the Baptist was killed by evil people. We also wonder why God lets innocent people be killed by evil people and why God lets ungodly people become prosperous while godly people suffer. Here is the answer to this dilemma. We believe that all things are under God’s control. We believe that our God is the ruler of history and the author of our destiny. We believe that God is good and that in all things God works for the good of those who love him. When we see all things in God’s big picture, there is always God’s divine plan and his good purpose. There is nothing being done by chance or by accident in the people of God. There is no one who dies without God’s permission. Jesus promised in Matthew 10:29 that even two sparrows are not sold for a penny and fall to the ground outside our Father's care, which means without God’s permission. John the Baptist died according to God’s divine plan and his schedule. In God’s appointed time God took John the Baptist to his side. Do you remember what John the Baptist said when he was asked about Jesus? He said, “*He (*Jesus*) must become greater; I must become less*” (Jn 3:30) John knew that his mission was going to end at the appearance of Jesus. John the Baptist came as a forerunner who prepared the way for the Lord King Jesus. As Jesus’ ministry started to grow, John realized that his mission was over. God took John according to his divine plan and schedule. We call this God’s divine sovereignty. When we accept and believe God’s divine sovereignty over human history and our lives, we can overcome this evil world. We can overcome the power of darkness. We can understand the work of God. Jesus was not dismayed by John’s death. He did not work for the release of John because he knew the Father’s will and plan.

From these three different stories, we learn the common point that we live in an era of darkness, where spiritual ignorance, injustice, violence, and immorality are rampant. We learn how Jesus overcame this dark world. He called his disciples and sent them out to preach the good news and heal the sick. Jesus was not involved in any political turmoil. Rather, he continued to advance the gospel, raise his disciples, and expand his kingdom as we do now. Amen!