

# The Gospel According to Matthew

By

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

### MATTHEW 10:1-23

BETWEEN the final charge of the last chapter, and the action of the King now described, there is a close and a very striking connection. It is first to be carefully noted that the men whom He charged to pray specifically for laborers, were those whom He immediately sent forth to labour.

- "**Pray ye,**" is the first command;
- "**Go ye,**" is the next.

The men who have learnt to look with the eyes of Jesus until they feel with the heart of Jesus; and who, out of such vision and such feeling, begin to pray, are more than half ready for the work of bringing in the harvest. "**Pray,**" that is the first thing; but "**go**" is the next; and as surely as He says "**pray,**" He says "**go.**" Yet let it be remembered that He never says "**go**" until He has said "**pray.**"

If that fundamental connection between the compassion of the King, and His commissioning of the twelve is recognized, then we may proceed to the discovery of the main value of this section. That main value lies in the fact that it contains "**His commandments.**"

Chapter eleven begins, "**And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding His twelve disciples, He departed thence to teach and preach in their cities.**"

Thus it is at once seen that chapter ten consists of the Master's charge to those men whom He was about to send out, in co-operation with Himself, to do the work which lay so heavily upon His heart.

In this charge the King Himself reveals:

- The lines of service,
- The methods to be adopted,
- The prayer to be offered.

So far in the propaganda of the King we have considered His enunciation of ethics; and have observed His exhibition of benefits. Now we see Him about to enter upon the great work of enforcing His claims; and first He sends forth these disciples. Thus they become more than disciples; He constitutes them apostles.

This is the first time the word is applied to them. Only once in Matthew is this word, which indicates their relation to Him in specific and well-defined service, made use of.

*An apostle is a delegate, the first messenger, the one who represents the King, whose only business is to represent the King, who speaks the word of the King, and speaks it with authority because he is sent, delegated, the ambassador of the King.*

Let us first make a broad analysis of the whole chapter, that we may follow its movement, and understand to some extent what the King was really doing, as He prepared those twelve men and sent them forth on their mission.

The King's outlook was upon the work which those whom He appoints will have to do to the end of the age. Some of the things which He said have no application to us; they were only for the men who were then with Him. Nevertheless there are underlying principles in every part of these charges which are of perpetual application.

The changes which would follow in circumstances and conditions were recognized by the King; and in an orderly movement, perfectly balanced, perfectly adjusted, He gave instructions to the apostles for the whole dispensation which He was about to initiate.

As the King stood in the midst of the twelve, He looked at them and at the immediate present; but He also looked with those clear, far-seeing eyes into the near decades; and still further He looked down all the centuries; and speaking to the first apostles, He delivered a charge which in its comprehensiveness and finality is applicable to the whole movement of His enterprise, until His second advent.

He declared the abiding principles, which must obtain through all the ages; and He described the changing conditions, which would necessitate changing methods.

This charge divided the age into three distinctly-marked epochs.

- In the first four verses we read of how our Lord called these disciples and named them apostles; and we have the names of the twelve.
- Then from verse five to the end of verse fifteen we have the first section of the charge.

The fifteenth verse reads, "**Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrhah in the day of judgment, than for that city,**" that is for any city to which these men would come and would be refused; against such a city He charged them to shake the dust from their feet. This is one movement, one division of the discourse.

- At verse sixteen it is evident that our Lord lifted His eyes and looked further on, and saw how His apostles, His messengers, these very men, would presently enter upon, a new phase in their work, and have to face new difficulties; He said, "**Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves.**"

That was the description of a new movement, quite different from the one described in verses five to fifteen, as we shall see more clearly presently. It ended with the strange words of verse twenty-three, **“But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.”** There ends the second movement in the great charge.

Then begins the third, which commences with the words, **“The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord;”** and runs to the end of the chapter. Thus, in this one discourse, the King referred to three distinct epochs:

The first division, verses five to fifteen, exactly describing the work of the apostles from the day when He ordained them, until the day of His own crucifixion. It had to do with their immediate work. All His instructions in that division were applicable to the men whom He sent forth, while He still lived amongst them, until the day of His crucifixion. With His crucifixion, the order initiated ended, and save in fundamental principles, the commission of those verses has no application to us.

Immediately following these instructions, He continued, **“Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves.”** Now, these men knew practically nothing of persecution until after the crucifixion of Jesus. He was rejected, but they were treated with respect, even by the crowds. The crowds argued with them, tried to understand what relation they bore to Jesus, asked them what Christ meant by certain things; but did not persecute them. He kept them to the end, bore the brunt of persecution, gathered it into His own heart, and they knew nothing of it. But when the rough and rugged Cross was revealed, persecution broke upon them from their own nation. In view of this He charged them that when they were persecuted in one city they were to flee to another, saying, **“Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.”**

In these words He was evidently referring to His coming in judgment at the fall of Jerusalem, which took place in the year A. D. 70. Thus the second period ended with the fall of Jerusalem. It was then that the Son of Man came in the sense in which He meant here. A very remarkable fact of history throws light upon this; never from the day of Jerusalem’s fall until now has a Christian believer been scourged in a Jewish synagogue.

From the moment when Jerusalem passed out of human history as a commonwealth, her direct persecution of Christ ended. Alas, and alas, that Christians have persecuted Jews, but the Jew has never persecuted the Christian since the fall of Jerusalem. Thus in the second movement the King was dealing with the new conditions of His apostles’ service, following His crucifixion and continuing until the fall of Jerusalem; and again, save in fundamental principles, the instructions are not applicable to us.

Then He saw still further down the centuries, all that would follow the fall of Jerusalem, to the end of the age; and in view of that period He began to talk about the relationship of His servants to Himself, going back to the word disciple, and no longer using the word apostle, thus including in the final movement of His instruction all the company of His children who will be His servants until He come again.

“ **The disciple is not above his master;**” and so on, in that wonderful passage in which He revealed this supreme truth, that after Israel’s nationality ceased, and His Church should become the instrument for the proclaiming of His Gospel, her power would consist in her immediate identification with Himself; and her mission be that of constant co-operation with His purpose.

That is, of course, only a broad survey of these commandments of the King.

We shall need to consider them more carefully; but before we do so, let us notice that the change of conditions created by the crucifixion of Jesus, and again by the fall of Jerusalem are self-evident. The position of these men was greatly changed after the crucifixion of Jesus; and it was as greatly changed again when the principal force in persecuting them was broken.

It is perfectly clear that the King foresaw these things, and that He understood perfectly the whole movement of the years that stretched before Him. Let us recognize the perfect wisdom and sufficiency of the King. One of the profoundest reasons for trusting Christ to-day in the matter of all Christian service is that here and elsewhere He revealed His perfect knowledge of conditions which no man could forecast, and which yet have transpired exactly as He foretold them.

Now let us go back to a more particular examination of the first two of these movements. We will notice the immediate application of what He said to the men who stood around Him as to their work until His crucifixion; and then the application of the next words, which He spoke to them concerning the period after His Cross until the destruction of Jerusalem. After considering the immediate application of these things, we will consider two principles of permanent value which bear their message to us.

*As to the first period, we first notice the sphere of their operations.*

- They were not to go to the Gentiles,
- They were not to go to the Samaritans.
- They were to “**Go rather to the lost sheep of the House of Israel.**”

It was a limited sphere. Ere He ascended all this was abrogated, as He said, “**Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.**”

Notice further, that He charged them that came into a city of Israel, being forbidden to go to a Gentile city, or a city of the Samaritan, they were to seek out those who were worthy. If the house were worthy they were to enter; if not, they were not to enter. That is the exact opposite of what we are to do to-day; the messenger to-day seeks the house of the lost and the unworthy. So that the charges He gave to these men, are not the charges He gives to us.

Yet again, notice the message these men were to deliver; that “**The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand;**” that the Kingdom was close because the King was there; that the King, long looked for, hoped for, waited for, was amongst them; that if they did but turn to Him they would find the Messiah.

It was a peculiar message.

- Not a word about forgiveness of sin,
- Not a word concerning the filling of the Holy Spirit,
- Not a word concerning the things which are our special message and glory.

Their message was Messianic, but not fully interpreted, and the proofs they were to give evidenced the divinity of their mission, “**Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils.**”

It is because men have lost the sense of the proportion of our Master’s orderly speech that, to-day, some imagine that all this is still our work. This is not our work. We have no commission to heal the sick miraculously. If we have a commission to heal the sick miraculously we have also a commission to raise the dead, for the two things are closely connected. Every man who claims that he has a commission to heal the sick, must, in order to convince of his authority, be able to raise the dead also.

We are not now discussing the question of divine healing. All healing is divine; the devil never heals. It is possible for God to heal us without medicine, without aid, but we have no warrant for claiming healing at the caprice of our will, but only as we use the means that God has given to us.

This commission to heal the sick, and raise the dead, and cleanse the lepers, and cast out demons, was a commission to those early disciples, their credentials of power, because they were preaching the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. The whole was withdrawn when the Spirit came, and made the Church the spiritual messenger of the Spiritual Kingdom, which finally is to unfold and manifest and realize the material also.

Then notice the methods they were to adopt.

They were to make no physical provision for themselves. They were to be dependent upon those to whom they came. They were to take no gold nor silver nor brass. That command was definitely set aside by our Lord in the words chronicled by Luke; “**When I sent you forth without purse, and scrip (wallet), and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. Then said He unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one.**”

The necessity for provision presently became part of the work of these men.

In this first commission He was speaking of a local and limited ministry which they were immediately to exercise.

Then the result of their coming was to be that they were to pronounce peace, a message of joy and gladness. But if the house refused, in the dust they cast behind them their curse remained upon that house. All that has changed now.

*Has He changed His method because this earlier method failed? No; this is a mistake we all often make. He fulfilled His first intentions by these early methods and then changed them.*

In the next section also we find words which were of immediate application.

First He said, “**Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves.**”

There have been other eras of persecution in the Church, but never from the day in which Jerusalem fell has there been a systematic persecution of Christians by Jews. That was a manifestation peculiar to the period immediately following His crucifixion. Another was that of the destruction of family peace. As the evangel came into the families of the Jews, and certain therein believed, strife followed in peculiar form and ferocity, such as had never been known. Then was to come the Spirit’s witness under circumstances of trial, the peculiar witness of defense.

Finally they were to haste through the cities of Israel because the coming of the Son of Man was imminent, and unless they hastened they would not have passed through the cities of Israel before He came.

Here again is a fact to be carefully noted. Never since the destruction of Jerusalem has Israel had a city anywhere on earth. She has gathered into the cities of the Gentiles and the people have made their power felt, but to-day Israel has no city to call its own. Jerusalem itself, “**the city of the great King,**” whose very dust is precious to the Jew, is the one spot in all the world he would fain possess. It is the one city in all the world that those who possess wish they did not. And yet those who hate it cannot lose it, and those who want it cannot gain it. Here is a problem for the politicians, in the face of which we must take God into account. There are more Jews gathered together in New York than ever were gathered together in Jewish cities in later times, but it is not their city; they are aliens among the nations.

What is meant here by the coming of the Son of Man? Some hold that the Second Advent of Jesus is past; that He actually came in Person at the time of the fall of Jerusalem; and was seen of some few faithful souls. There may be an element of truth in that view, but that does not exhaust the teaching of the New Testament concerning the Second Advent.

He had often come before;

- He had talked with Abraham,
- He had spoken to men in the past as the Angel of the Lord,
- Who shall say that in His Personal Form He did not guide the Roman legions as they took Jerusalem?

It is quite certain there can be no explanation of the coming of the Son of Man in this case except in the sense of judgment. His coming at the fall of Jerusalem, ended the cities of Israel, and this accounted for His urgency and haste in driving His apostles out to tell the story of the King and the Kingdom.

But if these two sections are very largely applicable to the days we have referred to, there are permanent principles in each.

In the first section none of the things we have mentioned apply to us. But in the words, “**Freely ye have received, freely give;**” we touch a deep permanent truth which never changes. It was His word to those early disciples who went with the first proclamation of His Messiahship.

It was His word to those whom He sent out as sheep among wolves; it is His word to us, “**Freely ye have received, freely give.**”

It is the law of Christian service as to its disposition, rather than in its amount. The word “**freely**” does not mean abundantly. Jesus does not say, “Abundantly ye have received, abundantly give.” The word signifies rather, “Gratuitously ye have received, gratuitously give.”

Our giving in service is to be on the pattern of God’s giving to us.

We cannot buy anything from God; we are not to expect men to buy anything from us in this sacred service. God is good to us not for gain to Himself, but out of His grace, out of His passion for giving.

Now as Jesus said to His workers in that earliest period, so He says to us, “**Freely ye have received, freely give.**” Our service is not to be for success or profit, but for the sake of those we serve, expecting nothing in return. This is the law of Christian service.

Freely we are to pour out of our best in sacrifice, in order to be in true co-operation with Him.

Then again in the second period, we find a word of immediate application, and of abiding principle; “**Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.**”

- “**Wise**” means *sagacious*, not sly; it is the quality of the serpent in its wariness for self-defense.  
- “**Harmless**” means *simple*, or as Luther almost perfectly explained it, without fault, without flaw, simple and undeviating in life.

That is a strange combination, but it is a perfect revelation.

It is impossible to be wise as serpents save as we are simple as doves, for the serpent’s wisdom ends when it becomes vicious.

It is impossible to be harmless as a dove without the wisdom of a serpent, for the dove’s simplicity ends when it becomes careless.

But we can have the perfect combination, because He says, “**I send you;**” and if He send us, He will give us His wisdom, His harmlessness. Let us see to it that we are about His business, ready to do His will, then we can lean back upon all that He is, and appropriate it for our work.

The teaching here for us in these first movements may be simply stated.

- Our authority is His; and proceeds out of His compassion for the unfit.
- Our service must be like His; gratuitous, free.
- Our attitudes are to be worthy of Him; we must be wise with His wisdom, simple with His simplicity.

**~ end of chapter 23 ~**

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