Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Principles for an Effective Missionary, Part 1
Scripture: Matthew 10:5-7
Code: 2277

It is our privilege again this morning to examine Matthew 10. I encourage you to take your Bible and turn with us to that very, very important and wonderful chapter. We are having a high and holy privilege every Lord's Day as we commune with God through the truth of the gospel of Matthew. We have found ourselves, after a couple of years, in the tenth chapter, and learning what the Spirit of God has for us here is one of the richest of all the experiences we have yet had.

In Matthew 10, our Lord sends out His disciples for the first time. We who have, 20 centuries later, been sent to reach our world can learn deep and profound truths from what He said to them. Let me read for you the text that we'll be discussing this week and next.

"These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, 'Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter not; but go, rather, to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons; freely ye have received, freely give. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor copper in your purses, nor a bag for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet a staff; for the workman is worthy of his food. And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and there abide till ye go from there. And when ye come into a house, greet it. And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment, than for that city."

As you know, if you've been with us in our study of Matthew, Matthew's message is clearly that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah; that is the thesis of his narrative. Jesus of Nazareth is God in human flesh; He is the promised King, Savior, and the Deliverer. He came to fulfill the promises and covenants, and to redeem the world.

In the first nine chapters of his gospel, Matthew amasses evidence verifying this claim about Jesus, so we have nine chapters of credentials. He has shown this by Christ's genealogy, birth, the homage He received from eastern kings, His threat to Herod, and His preaching, teaching, miracles, power, and words - he has shown every way possible that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

As we came to the close of chapter nine, we began to pull together the responses to those truths which Matthew has made self-evident. For one, look at Matthew 9:31. "They, when they were departed, spread abroad His fame in all that country." One of the things that happened from all of the tremendous credentials of Christ was that His fame began to spread everywhere.

Another thing happened in verse 31; the Pharisees said, "He casteth out demons through the prince of the demons." The conclusion of the religious leaders was that He was demon-possessed, from Hell, indwelt by Satan. So while His fame spread abroad among the people, the leaders were convinced He was Satanic. Yet verse 35 says, "Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people." He just continued to proliferate the credentials.

The important transition occurs in Matthew 9:36. One day, one time, as Jesus stood on the edge of a hill and surveyed the crowd beneath Him, he was moved with compassion; He was wrenched internally. "But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they were faint." Literally, they were beaten and bruised; they had been ripped limb to limb by their own leaders, who had imposed upon them a false, legalistic system of religion that denied the truth of God. They were scattered abroad, as sheep without a shepherd.

Jesus saw the vastness, the lostness, of the multitude and said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few." As you know from the study of that text, what He means by the 'harvest' is the judgment, for 'harvest' in Matthew is judgment; when God puts in the sickle and reaps. He could see this mass of lost, disoriented, weary people, moving as if they were criminals toward an inevitable judgment.

He says, "The people to go and warn them are so few." He realized He had to enlist others to assist Him, so He asked the disciples to pray for more workers in verse 38. Then, in Matthew 10, Jesus made them the answer to their own prayers. There is great integrity in that, when you are praying for something and you are willing to be the answer, and the disciples were. So Jesus then called His twelve disciples to Himself and gave them power to minister. Matthew 10:5 says, "These twelve Jesus sent forth."

We've had the wonderful privilege, over the last four or five weeks, of meeting the Twelve. It has been a wonderful time, hasn't it? We have decided that, summing it all up, they amount to the company of the unqualified; they really didn't have what it took to change the world. But it was not what they were, but what God made them. For in the process of their training, Jesus was molding them into what they needed to be to change the world.

Now it is time to send them out. Not finally and fully, as will happen after the day of Pentecost when they are sent forth, but in a first training mission format, for only few short weeks. He sent them out to

get a taste of what it would be like, and what they will inevitably experience as a way of life. So this is their first short-term missionary assignment. By the way, I like to think of the Twelve as the original missionaries - they were the first ones Jesus sent forth.

The thrust comes because Jesus perceives the judgment of men. I really believe that the great motive that we see in the book of Matthew, as well as often in the heart of Paul, is the inevitability of judgment. Paul said to the Corinthians in II Corinthians 5, "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." Jesus saw the harvest and called for laborers to go and warn men of that inevitable harvest.

As we approach Matthew 10:5, we have met them and now the Lord instructs them as they go. May I just give you a little bit of comprehension of the total picture? The instruction that He gives the disciples is for a short-term mission. But as you flow through the chapter, you find that as it progresses, He releases to them information that will be good for them for the life of their ministry. It also stretches beyond them to every other person the Lord sends out.

Some of it is very defined and confined, and some of it is very broad. It's almost telescopic; it starts with a very limited perspective and then begins to unfold and unfold, until you come to the end of the chapter and sense the Spirit of God driving His point right into your own heart. So here are principles meant for them on their first short-term mission, and yet they can be extrapolated and drawn out to apply to all of us who go in the name of Jesus Christ to reach people.

By the way, the chapter is divided into three parts. The first section begins in verse 5 and ends in verse 15 with the statement, "Verily I say unto you." That section talks about the task of the missionary, the task of the apostle, the task of the one sent. The second section goes to verse 23 and ends, "Verily I say unto you," and it talks about the reaction to the one sent. The third section goes to verse 42 and ends, "Verily I say unto you," and it talks about the cost to the one who is sent. So we'll learn about the task, the reaction, and the cost of being a disciple sent in the name of Jesus Christ.

We'll look at the task as the first section for this morning and for next Lord's Day. In verses 5-15, you have what I believe are effective principles for missionary work. If you're going to go out and do the Lord's work, if you're going as one sent by the Lord, representing Him, it is essential that you understand these principles.

I remember and article in *New Times Magazine*written by one critic of the church, in which he made this statement. He said, "Personally, I am convinced that Jesus had more class than most of His agents." Unfortunately, that is definitely the case. One of the tragedies of contemporary Christianity is that the people who purport to represent Jesus Christ don't represent Him at all. If we're going to be sent from Christ to touch the world with the reality of Christ, then we must listen carefully to what

He told the ones He sent out.

Let's look at the principles for an effective missionary. Number one, a divine commission. Verse 5 begins, "These twelve Jesus sent forth and commanded them." There is the commission. The apostles didn't volunteer (although they were willing to go - Christ did not act over against their wills), they were called; they were commissioned, much like Jeremiah, of whom the Lord said in chapter 1, "Before I formed you, I ordained you." The disciples were sovereignly called by God, they were given a divine commission, they were sent, dispatched, they were under orders.

It is first and foremost needful in the ministry to recognize that God has sent you. You'll remember I told you some months ago about the man who asked the young preacher after seeing so much pride in his life, "Was you sent, or did you just went?" First of all, you want to be sure you're sent before you go.

By the way, Mark 6:7 is a comparative passage that tells us Jesus sent them two by two. I think there is a reason why. For one thing, they would be companions in times of possible loneliness. For another, they would be strength to one another in times of temptation; for another, they would be an encouragement in times of despondency and persecution. For another, they could relieve each other in the matter of preaching and healing, which would be going on all the time. And for another, it was well known to them that the testimony of anyone was to be confirmed by two or three witnesses. So the Lord sent them two by two.

It probably only lasted a few weeks, but the apostles were still the ambassadors of Christ, officially sent. They were in the same category as Paul, who said, "God has given me the ministry as an oikonomia, as a stewardship," as he said in II Corinthians 3, "A trust is given me." That was such a serious matter that Paul said in I Corinthians 9:16, "Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel," or literally, "Curse me if I don't preach." He had been given a divine commission. He was saying, "I can no more go AWOL on this deal than someone can do that in the service." This is a serious matter.

In their case, their commissioning was direct. The Lord walked up to them and said, "You follow Me." That has been very clear; they didn't put out fleeces and pray for the Lord to show them signs. I mean, He just grabbed them and took them. With us, it's a little more indirect. People, especially young men, going into ministry will often ask me, "How do I know if I am called to the ministry?" Basically, I think there are three criteria by which we can understand that.

Number one is a strong desire. If you delight in the Lord, He will give you the desire of your heart; I believe God has planted in my heart the desire. I Timothy 3:1 says, "If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desires a good thing." I think the implication of Paul's word to Timothy is that men will desire that, and ministry is something that God puts in the heart today.

Secondly is the confirmation of the church. You may say, "I'm called to preach," and others might say, "We've heard you; you're not called to preach." So you have to have the confirmation of the church. That is what Paul was saying when he said to Timothy, "Neglect not the gift of God that is in you, which was given you by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the elders," confirmation of those around you in the church.

Finally, the ministry is made possible by circumstances. In I Corinthians 16:9, Paul says he is in Corinth because, "A great door, and effectual, is opened unto me." So you're looking at desire, confirmation and affirmation, and at opportunity. You know, if you go through all of those things, and your heart is set and fixed on a goal, then that's the call of God.

So they were called in a very immediate, very external, visible, physical way; we are called internally, but nonetheless called and commissioned. You'll notice that it says He not only sent them but also commanded them. That is a very interesting word, paraggello. It demands an awful lot of attention; I wish we had more time to really get into that word. But basically means 'to give orders.' If you study that word and trace it through its usages in the Greek language, you find some very interesting things.

For example, first and foremost, it is a military word. It means a superior giving orders to an inferior; it is a command issued to soldiers. That we see in its secular usage. It is an aggressive, definitive statement of absolute behavior that requires obedience. That is its primary use in a military way. Secondly, it is used in legal terms. There are some papyri that have been discovered in which this paraggelloverb was used of summoning a man to court. In other words, he is bound by the law; he is bound by a legal injunction against him to obey and respond.

We also find in some secular sources that the word is used of an ethical concept. It is used, for example, as Aristotle teaches morals or ethics to his students. They become binding on the basis of the integrity of the individual. When you learn what is ethically right, you are bound to that, if you have any character. Then it is what you might call a technique word; it is a word to define certain technique. For example, it is used of the rules of grammar, or rules of oratory, or rules of literary composition. It is a word that defines exactly how something is to be done. Fifthly, it is a medical term. It is used of a doctor prescribing something for someone who is sick, instruction for someone who wants to be well.

Let me sum it up. Here is a word that is a word of military command; you don't have any choice but to respond. Here is a word that is a word of legal obligation; you have no choice but to respond. Here is a word of ethical standard; you have no choice but to comply. Here is a word of technique, which means if you're going to do it right, this is the way to do it; there is no other way to respond. It is also a word of medical prescription; if you want to be well, you do it this way. It is a word, then, that in every dimension binds upon man a response.

As you trace the word in the New Testament, and it is used at least 30 times, you find that it is repeatedly used as the standard Christian term for instruction. In Luke 5:14, Jesus used it to instruct a leper. In Luke 8:29, He used it to command an evil spirit to come out of a demoniac. In Luke 8:56, He used it to instruct Jairus. In Luke 9:21, He used it to command His disciples. In Acts, it is used of the Sanhedrin's command to Peter and John to stop preaching, and in Acts 15 of the Pharisees' command to observe the ceremonial law. Paul used it in his instruction to Timothy, as he talks about what widows ought to do. It is used in the Pastoral Epistles; it is used many places. It is just a word that means we are bound to respond.

So you realize you are commissioned by the Lord Jesus Himself, and that you have no choice but to respond because you are a soldier and He is the commander; because you are in court and He is the judge; because you are the one who is to live the life and He is the one who sets the moral standards; because you can only carry out the task and He is the one who determines how it is to function; because you are the patient and He is the doctor, you are to respond. I say this so many times when I talk to men in the ministry: what God wants in a ministry is not your creativity and innovation; what He wants is your obedience.

I was writing an article Saturday for our coming convention, and was reminding those who will be reading, as I wrote in the article, that the preacher is not a chef; he's a waiter. God doesn't want you to make the meal; He just wants you to deliver it to the table without messing it up. That's all. We are servants under divine commission.

People, that's a binding thing. I say to you that is a binding thing. I am bound to fulfill that commission before God. I think that's what Jesus was doing with these Twelve. I think it's good that the Lord binds us, because there are so many days we'd like to get out, but we're bound. We all say, "Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel." All of us have been commissioned in some sense, some more officially as evangelists and teaching pastors, but we all are bound to obey Christ's call to go and represent Him in this world.

I thank God for these folks that go down to Hollywood Boulevard and walk up and down the street and present Jesus to those people, don't you? You can do it anywhere, and I believe the call of God is binding on our lives in that regard. The effective missionary, the effective apostle, the effective disciple realizes he is under divine orders - he doesn't have any options. He is committed to obedience, to following the principles of the Word of God as commanded. That's why when we go into all the world to make disciples, we baptize and teach them to observe all things whatsoever have been commanded, because that's the whole issue. The Lord wants obedience.

Let me give you a second principle. I believe an effective missionary is not only marked by a divine commission, but I believe he is marked by a central objective. I believe if you're going to be effective

in serving God, there has to be a very clear focus, a central focus. Look at verse 5 again. He commanded them saying, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter not." Those are possessive genitives, which means, "Don't go into a road belonging to the Gentiles or a city belonging to the Samaritans. Don't go near Gentiles or Samaritans."

You say, "What has Jesus got against them? Is this the Jewish Gospel? Is it limited?" It is here; it reads to me just like it reads to you. In verse 6 He says, "But instead, you go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." May I add that this is not a permanent command. This is a very dispensational statement, a narrow statement, limited to this time and place and this, the plan of God. I'll talk about that in a moment, but what I want you to see out of it is that it illustrates how God gives people very clear objectives, a very central focus, a very limited mission.

David McKenna has rightly said, "Self-styled Messiahs are always megalomaniacs who want to win the world and win it now." Some people's perception of ministry is so vast that their ministry winds up being like a big birdbath - a mile long and an inch deep. The focus that our Lord gives to us here, I think, is the very narrowness of ministry.

You say, "Does God not care for Gentiles?" Of course He cares for Gentiles! Just in case you might wonder about that, turn back to Matthew 8:5-12. You'll find there that, "When Jesus entered Capernaum, He was approached by a centurion whose servant was sick." That's a Gentile, a Roman soldier who commanded 100 men. Jesus responded to that man. I believe Jesus brought not only healing to that Gentile's servant, but also salvation to that household. Jesus makes a great statement in verse 11. He says, "I say unto you that many shall come from the east and west," and that means east and west of Palestine, "Many Gentiles shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom [Jewish people] shall be cast out."

Don't be confused; the Lord has already made it abundantly clear that He will reach Gentiles. In fact, in the Old Testament, all you need to do is read the prophet Isaiah. You will find, in Isaiah 49:6 and 54:1-3 it says, "Jerusalem will carry the message to all the nations." He loves the Gentiles! Later on, in Matthew 28, He says, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature."

We're going to see in chapter 13 how Jesus begins to turn away from Israel and to talk about the church, which Paul calls, "The fullness of the Gentiles." The Lord always had the Gentiles in His plan. You say, "Does He have something against the Samaritans?" No, the Samaritans were OK, but the Jews hated them. The Jews absolutely despised them. It was one thing to be a Gentile - no one could help being born a Gentile. But the Samaritans were corrupted, because they were half-breeds. They reflected the intermarriage of Jew and Gentile, which was a crime unforgivable in the minds of many Jews. Jesus didn't have a problem with that.

You see, the first person recorded in Scripture to whom Jesus announced He was the Messiah was a Samaritan woman living in the city of Sychar. She had many husbands, and at the time was living with a man who wasn't her husband; she was not a nice lady. Yet it was to her that He revealed that He was the Messiah. He had no problem there. When Jesus taught how men should love their neighbors, He used a Samaritan as an illustration.

You say, "If God loves Gentiles and Samaritans, then why does He tell them not to go to them?" I'm glad you asked! By the way, the Samaritans had fomented the hatred, because 20 years before the time of Christ, Samaritans had stolen into the temple in the middle of the night during Passover and thrown dead men's bones all over the temple enclosure, which polluted it. So there was a terrible hatred at that point in time.

There were lots of problems in going into a Samaritan town, and in going to a Gentile town, particularly for this little group of unqualified guys. Let me give you three reasons He told them not to go there. Number one, I call the special place of the Jews. The Jews were God's chosen people and they were the ones to whom were given the covenants, the promises, and the law. So in the line of God's plan, they were to be offered the Kingdom first. That's all.

First, they were approached by John the Baptist, who came to them and said, "Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand, imminent, available." Then Jesus Himself came and said the same, and now Jesus was commanding the disciples to give the people that same message - the Kingdom is at hand. He said, "Offer them the rule of God on earth." Heaven has come to earth; God wants to rule. Yes, it's a spiritual dimension; yes, it's within you; yes, it's in your heart; yes, it's the acceptance of the lordship of Christ, but it also has an earthly aspect.

Had the Jewish nation embraced their Messiah, the internal and the external would have come together at that moment. He said, "You tell them the Kingdom is imminent, available; they can have it if they repent and believe. They are the people through whom the rest of the world is to be blessed. They are the tents of Shem, through whom all the nations are blessed.

John 4:22 says, "Salvation is of the Jews." That doesn't mean salvation was only for them, it means it comes through them; they were to be the emissaries, the witnesses; Jerusalem was to be the launching point for evangelism, the place where the nations came to see the Messiah. They were to be His witness people, so He said, "Go there first," much like Paul on His missionary journeys. Even though he was a missionary to the Gentiles, he always went to the synagogue first because he went to the people of God first of all to gather them together to help him reach the Gentiles. So Jesus says, "You go first to them." I can promise you that if they had gone first to the Gentiles and Samaritans, the Jews wouldn't have listened to them. So the special place of the Jews was the first reason.

The second one, I call the special problem of the Twelve. The disciples hardly were up to the task of reaching their own people, to say nothing of trying to reach the Gentiles and Samaritans, whose culture they did not understand that well, whose biases and prejudices they could not have overcome easily. They were not equipped for that. Do you know that nothing every really cracked open the Gentile world, with the exception of Peter's confrontation of one God-fearing man named Cornelius, nothing ever made a dent in the Gentile world until a man came along by the name of Paul?

He was born of the tribe of Benjamin, an Israelite of Israelites, zealous for the law, and trained under Gamaliel - a true Jew in every way. But educated and instructed in Gentile culture, and from a Gentile area, he was able to bridge the gap and reach the Gentiles. The disciples just weren't up to that; it wasn't time for them yet, they weren't ready. They didn't have the technique or backgrounds, so they couldn't build the bridges. If they had gone to the Gentiles or Samaritans first, they never would have been able to come back to the Jews. The Jews would have written them off as those who brought about a Gentile and Samaritan religion.

Thirdly, and less important than those two, I think another reason they were sent only to the Jews was because of the special point of attack. Any commander knows you can't do everything. You can't be like the man who jumped on his horse and rode of madly in all directions. You have to have specifics. The possibilities were varied, so Jesus gave the disciples a specific target. "Just do this: go to Galilee, and the Jews, who are the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

By the way, the phrase 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel' simply refers to the Jews. If you compare it with Matthew 9:36, you'll see that. He saw the multitude and they were sheep without a shepherd; they are the lost sheep, they have been disconnected from the Shepherd, they are out of the fold, wandering hopeless and helpless. He says, "Go to them, My people, Israel. They are the ones to whom the promises were originally given; they are the ones with whom you can communicate and have an audience and reception, so go to them." Our Lord Himself reflects to them what was His own specific ministry.

You probably have not thought about this, but do you realize that the Lord Himself never went to the Gentiles? His ministry was almost exclusively to the Jews. In Matthew 15:24, He says, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." They were His focus. The Gentile world would come after that. Jesus had a tremendous economy of effort, tremendous clarity of objective.

I think one of the things frustrates people in ministry is that they don't have a clear objective. You can be so easily diverted. I have gone to mission fields and talked with missionaries who have been on the mission field a long time. I find that many of them are doing a little of everything, and I wonder if they are accomplishing anything. They don't have a clear objective. I think part of an effective ministry is to have a clear objective. Know your gifts, what God has equipped you to do; know the

needs, callings, opportunities, and the desires of your heart, and find a track and run in it.

My grandfather taught my dad and my dad taught me that most people never do anything well. So if you do one thing well, you will be way ahead of most people - just one thing. Find the one thing God wants you to do and do it. I think about that a lot. It's easy for me to get pulled off into all kinds of projects. I'm telling you, every day someone wants me to go do something. Help us, go here, go there, do this.

Sometimes, I feel as if I'm being ripped to pieces. I have to go back to the tremendous focus on the objective that I see in Christ. I know what God has called me to do: to preach. I know that, it's what I'm to do. I know where He has called me to preach, and that's right here. I just want to affirm that, in case some of you are thinking otherwise. He has called me to preach here, and I know that. He has called me to preach here, teaching His Word expositionally; I know that because I am compelled to do that in my heart. He has called me not only to preach, and preach here, and preach expositionally, but He has called me to preach the New Testament primarily, because that is the mystery and I have been called to preach the mystery; it says so in Colossians 1. I know what I am called to do, and that's what God wants me to do. There are lots of other things I could do, and sometimes I have to fight it off. But we all need to keep that constant focus.

You say, "What about this? What about that?" and you can get all concerned. The Lord will take care of it; He's got other folks. I don't have to do it all. If I just do one thing right, just one thing He gave me to do, I'll let Him take care of where it goes. I've said this so many times, if I take care of the depth of it, He'll take care of the breadth of it. If He wants to spread it around, that's His business. I just want to hit the target. I'm committed to that.

We need that kind of focus. In a church like ours, I feel that there are so many things going on that some people find themselves lost in the middle, dizzy, saying, "What do we do?" They eventually wind up doing nothing or a little of everything, like the smorgasbord Christian. That isn't the idea; we need to focus. The Lord said, "The works which the Father hath given Me to finish, the same works that I do. My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me. I have come to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." He was going to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and only the ones who admitted their sin. That was a narrow focus, a narrow perspective, but that's an effective ministry: do one thing and do it well. Precision in ministry.

The third principle is as far as we'll go this morning. I think effective missionary work involves a clear message; not only a central objective, but a clear message. I grieve in my heart at the befuddled condition of Christianity today; our message is anything but clear.

I was on a plane the other day, and a pastor sat next to me. We were going to a pastors' conference in Chicago. He said, "Let me give you a demonstration." He took out a piece of paper, and just kept

writing and writing and writing on the same tiny piece of paper. Then he handed me the paper and asked, "What does this say?" It was all scribble, all kinds of scribble on top of scribble in one little area. I said, "I don't know what it says; how could anyone know what it says?" He smiled and said, "What was my original message to you?" I said, "I don't have a clue!"

He said, "Let me tell you what I did. Take a piece of paper and write 'Christ,'" so I did that. "Now, over the top, write 'Baptist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Episcopal, Pentecostal, Charismatic, dispensational, fundamentalist, liberal, Protestant.'" He gave me about twelve other things to write. Then he said, "Give that to an unbeliever and ask him what the original message was." He won't have a clue.

If you pick up the daily news and look at the church section, it's utterly hopeless. Part of the problem is that we don't stick with the central message. What does He say in verse 7? "As you go, preach. As you preach, say, 'The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.'" It can't get much simpler; I love that verse. You say, "That's the whole sermon? Where's the rest of what you're supposed to say?" That's enough. The Kingdom of Heaven is a big enough subject to cover everything that God is interested in. So if you want to open your mouth, make sure you talk about God's projects, not man's.

Preach the Kingdom, the rule and reign of God, that Heaven has come to Earth. The Kingdom of Heaven is seen three ways: in conversion, when men enter the Kingdom; in consecration, when we live out the Kingdom (Romans tells us that the Kingdom is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace, joy, and the Holy Spirit); and in consummation, when the Kingdom comes to earth in its millennial form. Until that time, we preach the Kingdom. Jesus taught His disciples nothing but that, the principles of God's rule: that He is Lord, that men are to submit and obey, because God rules. Even after His resurrection, Acts 1 says Jesus taught them things pertaining to the Kingdom for forty days.

It can get confusing for people when they listen to preachers; you say you're a preacher, and they haven't got a clue what your message is until they hear you because all kinds of preachers preach all kinds of stuff! The average unbeliever who turns on the television finds such a disparity that it's virtually impossible for him to know the real message.

I was traveling with a team in Mississippi, preaching Christ in black high schools at the time that Martin Luther King was assassinated. We were going to two or three schools a day, holding assemblies and preaching Christ, and we had a great time. One night after finishing an assembly in which the Lord had blessed in a wonderful way, we visited with a family in a rural area. It was late when we left, and we noticed someone following us.

We were in the middle of nowhere on a dirt road about ten miles from where we were staying. Suddenly blue lights started flashing behind us and the car pulled up beside me, so I stopped the car. A great big man wearing a sheriff's badge got out and said, "You went through a stop light." I said, "What? There are no stop lights around here." It's a dirt road, and it's 11 o'clock at night in a farm area. I said, "You must be mistaken." He said, "I'm not mistaken. You went through a stop light." I said, "I didn't go through a stop light." He then reached for a club in his belt and I said, "You're right; I went through a stop light." I wasn't going to argue about it! He said, "Follow me. We're going to the jail."

We followed him for ten miles to the jail. He took us in and collected our money as collateral, I guess for whatever was going to happen. He asked, "What are you telling kids in your school meetings? Do you tell them about civil rights?" I said, "No." Then he asked if we were telling them about marches, protests, or boycotts. I said no to all those things. Then I said, "We're telling them about Jesus Christ. We would be happy to tell you about Him, too." He said, "I'm already the Sunday School superintendent. I don't have any need to hear about that." It was an interesting night, to put it mildly. There were many so many people like him in that area who called themselves ministers but who were not talking about Christ and the Kingdom of Heaven. It's no wonder some of those people were paranoid.

Satan is not stupid. The best way to render the Gospel of no effect is to make sure no one knows what it is. It is the message that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand; that imminently and available to every person is the rule and reign of God in their lives, here and now, as well as earthly, millennially, and eternally. That is our message.

I won't get pulled into politics, although I have some strong feelings about things. I won't get pulled into other things; I say 'no' to that stuff all the time because my focus cannot change from the Kingdom. I wish that every time Christians opened our mouths, something about the Kingdom came out. Wouldn't that be good? Let's talk about God's rule and His Kingdom.

I just love that He says to them, "Just say that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." Now what were they going to do? Just go around saying that over and over again? Of course not, He was implying to fill it up with all the content that term deserves, and we've been through that term about ten times in the previous ten chapters, so you know what's there.

There is a sense of urgency in that statement. I know and you know that it wasn't long after this when the Lord turned away from Israel because they didn't take the message offered to them. I think there is urgency and immanency in this world as well; I don't know how long we have before the Lord comes, so we need to be proclaiming the Kingdom with urgency. Effective missionaries have a divine commission, central objective, and a clear message.

You want to know something frustrating? The next point is the best point of all. I'd ask you how spiritual you are and take a vote of whether you want me to do it this morning or next week, but I'm not going to do that. I'm just going to pray that if you don't come back next week, the Lord will make you sick because it is the best point of all. Let's have a word of prayer together.

Thank You, Father, for Your good and gracious Word to us. Thank You that You can even use us at all, who are so unqualified. Thank You for the example that You called these Twelve, sent them, and used them to change the world, and we are the fruit, generations later, of their obedience. Should Jesus tarry, may there be generations ahead who will be the fruit of our obedience. Send us, Lord, as You choose. Help us to focus on that ministry You've gifted us to do and to make the message crystal clear. We thank You in Christ's name, Amen.

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