

Explore the Bible: Sends

March 13, 2019

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for March 31 focuses on Mark 6:7-13, 30-32.*

From early on in his public ministry, Jesus anticipated the time when his faithful followers would continue the ministry he began. As those early followers discovered, success was determined by their faithfulness, for the response of people to their message was not an accurate measure. Only the assessment of the Master mattered.

Sent by Jesus (Mark 6:7)

Mark indicated the purpose why Jesus appointed the 12 disciples: “that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons” (3:14-15). This present passage describes the implementation of that appointment. Mark provided no explicit rationale for the choice to send the disciples out in pairs. Craig Keener notes the practice was common in both Jewish and Greek cultures (*IVP Bible Backgrounds Commentary: New Testament*, 142).

More significant than the method by which they went was the means. Jesus invested the disciples with the same authority he possessed. They were to act in his name and with his authority to extend the reach of the kingdom of God.

As followers of Christ, we share the responsibility of the disciples to continue to extend the kingdom of God. The experience of believers throughout the ages since indicates that the ministry of exorcism seems to lack the urgency that it had during the time of Jesus and the disciples, although we dare not ignore the conflict (Ephesians 6:12). We share not

only the responsibility of the disciples but, as Jesus' representatives, his authority as well. *What is empowering, compelling and comforting about this reality?*

Equipped by Jesus (Mark 6:8-11)

Mark presented surprisingly few details of Jesus' commission to the 12 (compare with Matthew 10). The instructions Mark chose to include focused on what the disciples were to do without. They were forced to abandon self-sufficiency. What they were restrained from taking highlights the contrast with what they were given. They ventured out with nothing else than the authority of Jesus.

If they were not to provide for their own needs, how would their needs be provided? That answer came in Jesus' instructions (6:10-11). People receptive to their message, that is, those who dwelt in the houses they would enter (6:9), would provide for their needs.

If no such house were available to the disciples, this meant that no one in the town was willing to accept the message. More than unfriendliness or lack of hospitality, to reject the disciples and their message was to reject the authority who sent them out. The dust shaken from their feet had significant implications.

The special instructions to the disciples were meant for them alone. One would misapply the lessons of this passage to insist on wearing sandals to spread the message of Christ in Siberia! Instead, the critical principle is that the Lord will provide for those who engage in the task they have been commissioned to do. That provision looked one way for the disciples; it might look differently for a follower of Christ today. *Are you letting a lack of trust in the Lord's provision keep you from doing what the Lord has for you to do?*

Empowered by Jesus (Mark 6:12-13)

The authority of Jesus attended the obedience of the disciples. Twelve men of varying backgrounds united only by their common commitment to Jesus of Nazareth found themselves with ability to do things that defied natural explanation. The miraculous demonstration of power over evil spirits and illness demonstrated the presence of the kingdom. These acts of power legitimized the disciples' call to repentance. There was no mere mission of goodwill.

How can you and your church strike the balance between meeting the physical needs of people with the call to repentance to enter into the kingdom? Why is the balance important?

Resting with Jesus (Mark 6:30-32)

Prior to the narration of the reunion of Jesus and his disciples, Mark included a seemingly disconnected story about Herod Antipas and the fate of John the Baptist (6:14-29). What seems on the face of things to be disconnected to the sending of the disciples is another example of intercalation in Mark (i.e., the Markan Sandwich). This intervening story begins as Herod, the Rome-appointed ruler of Galilee, heard of Jesus and his apostles' actions in Galilee. He concluded that John had been raised from the dead, and God was at work through him again.

"Why had John been beheaded?" asks the reader. The short answer was that John, like the prophet Elijah, ran afoul of the irreverent ruler and his wife (see 1 Kings 17-21). Unlike Elijah, though, God did not miraculously deliver John. John's story, embedded in the midst of the disciples' mission exploits, not only foreshadows the impending rejection and death of Jesus, but also demonstrates to Mark's readers that their own faithfulness to Jesus' commission would not guarantee their success or safety. The reason

is that the proclamation of the kingdom entailed a confrontational aspect: repentance (6:12, 18).

While the response of the people to the disciples varied, Jesus' reception of them was assured. Jesus cared for these disciples whom he had commissioned. They had been faithful to their task, so Jesus offered them what they needed most: "a quiet place [to] get some rest" (6:31). The provision for the disciples while they were on their mission continued; this retreat to a solitary place was more of Jesus' provision.

The disciples' retreat serves as a good reminder for us. God uses his faithful servants to expand his kingdom, but the kingdom's expansion does not depend upon those servants. We are no one's savior. *How can we stay reminded to trust the Lord to expand his kingdom and avoid trusting in ourselves and our efforts?*

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