

Spreading the revolution—Matthew 9:35-10:15

Theme: Jesus' revolution is for everyone, so those who've joined it are sent out to tell others about it

The revolution is changing lives—people are getting healed, the good news of freedom and new life is being proclaimed. But the need is so great. Jesus sees ordinary folk weighed down by the burden of living and the fact that their shepherds—the religious and political leaders of Israel—were failing to offer them any help and guidance. So not only does he do something about it, he sends his disciples to spread the good news of his revolution in every Galilean town.

Questions:

1. When were you first aware that Jesus loved you?
2. In what ways are your neighbours harassed and helpless? How might the gospel be good news for them?
3. In what ways can Christians offer leadership in our society? What leadership do you offer?
4. Do we regularly pray for our neighbours? Are we ready to be the answer to those prayers?
5. Who are the people we look up to in this area of mission? How has their example helped us to get involved in sharing our faith?
6. Do we expect to see people being healed when we share our faith? In what ways?
7. In what ways are we already sharing our faith with our neighbours? How can we encourage one another to do it more effectively?
8. Do we always invite non-church people to events at our church or in our home or will we go to their homes and the places where they gather to share our faith?
9. How do we know when someone is 'worthy' of the gospel, open and ready to hear us share it with them?
10. How might this passage help us as a church to be more effective in proclaiming the good news of Jesus in Bromley? [please share any good ideas with the wider church]
11. As church-going declines in the UK, do we think there's a plentiful harvest? How can we gather it in?
12. How do we maintain relationship with a friend who says they don't want to talk about our faith?
13. what does the list in 10:2-4 tell us about working together in mission?

Your stories:

Potted summary

Jesus provides the kind of leadership to Israel that the Pharisees and others failed to provide by announcing the arrival of God's Kingdom in work and word (9:35-38). Here those who have joined his movement are given the same task (10:16-42), Jesus teaches his friends how to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom by going to their neighbours rather than expecting their neighbours to come to them.

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What the passage is about....

Jesus' revolution is not just for a select few—it's for the whole world, starting with Galilee. Matthew shows us the kind of leadership Jesus offers through his ministry and reminds his first readers—and us—that we need to be spreading his good news far and wide by offering the same kind of leadership. Lost people need guides and we are to be those guides to our friends and neighbours, helping them find their way into God's Kingdom.

1) the king's compassion (9:35-38)

This summary statement, coming before the second discourse in the gospel, is very like the one that introduced the first in 4:23-25. In both the focus is on what Jesus is doing as well as what he's teaching. Here Matthew adds the emphasis that Jesus acts out of compassion—in contrast to what the Pharisees and others were doing which was wholly self-serving.

i) love: (36) people are searching for something—a way of living that makes sense and doesn't leave them used up and feeling frazzled at the end of the day, values that stand the test of time, answers to life's big questions.

Jesus offers this—it's what his revolution is all about; it's what he came to give the world. And his heart breaks as he sees people harassed and helpless, caught up in lives that don't satisfy and being led astray by people who should have known better.

ii) leadership: he is the good shepherd (36b; see John 10) offering to lead the people where they need to go—unlike Israel's current leaders who were not offering anything except empty piety and armed rebellion against Rome.

Jesus' leadership brought healing, good news (35) and a new community of sharing and support for everyone. He offers fresh direction and a cause worth living and dying for.

He likens the harassed and helpless to a harvest that's ready to be brought in (37). But who will do it? We will—and he challenges his followers first to pray (38) and then he sends them into their neighbourhoods in answer to their prayer.

2) the king's commission (10:1-16)

Matthew's church would have known of the Twelve—indeed possibly have met some of them on their travels. They were the heroes of the very early days of their movement (except for Judas who is a warning of what can happen even to those who start out well) and here he tells the story of their calling and first trip announcing the arrival of the Kingdom.

He tells us all this so that these people might be models for us as we share the good news about the revolution that Jesus has brought to the world. There are three things we need to note before we look in more detail at Jesus' mission mandate:

- they are called to him before they are sent out (1a). They spend time learning at his feet and watching what he does.
- he shares his authority with them (1b); they will be doing his work wherever they go, as though he were physically with them, working through them (7-8).
- The mission is urgent—the harvest is ready (9:37-38); it will spoil if it's left in the field.

What Matthew offers in the rest of this chapter (5-42) is not a blueprint for mission, but some key principles for spreading the revolution, hinging on v16: the need to think carefully about what we're doing because this is not a risk-free enterprise. From v17 he talks about the opposition we'll face (the topic of our next study). Here he talks about methods—where to go, what to do and how to live.

i) start local (5-6): Jesus has already had plenty of contact with the Gentile world—the magi (2:11-12), the centurion (8:5-13), the demon-possessed Gadarenes—so he is not banning contact with them. Rather he is saying that the Twelve should start on their home patch and not go to regions beyond Galilee, learn how to do mission among people who speak their language. At the end of the gospel, he extends the mission to the world.

ii) works and words (7-8): the revolution must be experienced as

well as heard, so we generously give just as we have received. Jesus sends us to get alongside people in their needs, hopes and aspirations so that they can see, through what we do and how we live as well as through our words, what his revolution could do for their lives. These people are harassed and helpless and Jesus wants his disciples to set them free.

iii) travel light (9-10): This could be an indication of the short-term nature of this mission activity. But the principle holds good however long we're on the road. Jesus calls on us to trust two sources simultaneously for our support: God—this is 6:25-33 in action—and the kindness of strangers. This is the thrust of the proverbial saying at the end of v10 (Paul uses it twice in 1 Cor 9:14 and 1 Tim 5:18, suggesting that from early on it was a church principle).

Jesus assumes his followers will be offered and accept hospitality in the towns to which they go. It's what he did—asking a Samaritan woman for water, having dinner with friend and foe alike. It means that the missionary is getting alongside people on their home ground, seeing life on their terms and so putting themselves in a better position to share how Jesus can meet them in the midst of their struggles and disappointments.

iv) be discerning (11-15): hospitality might come from many sources but Jesus says we should seek out those who appear to be open to our message.

The greeting (12) is more than just 'hello'; it's offering 'peace' (13; see Luke 10:5-6) in the form of sharing a little bit of the gospel. If there's openness there, you'll know it, says Jesus; so stay, accept their hospitality and continue to share your life and good news.

Of course, many people in Galilee will have heard of Jesus, maybe been part of the crowd at some time, listening to his teaching, seeing the healings. Such folk would be 'worthy' in the sense of interested and open to hear more, and they should be the focus of our activity (see 13:11-13).