

Series: What We Need Now
Title: Great Commission Living
Text: Mark 6:7-13
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Verse 7

Our current passage follows Mark's account of Jesus' rejection at Nazareth (Mark 6:1-6). Instead of letting that experience in His hometown detour Him from His mission, Jesus used it as a springboard for greater ministry. Knowing His time was short (Mark 3:6), He prepared His inner circle for His departure. Verse 7 says, "He summoned the Twelve and began to send them out in pairs and gave them authority over unclean spirits" (Mark 6:7). Notice that our Lord was not a "solo artist" in ministry.¹ He knew His movement would require an army of disciple makers. The work of the Church has never been, nor will it ever be, a one man mission. Teamwork and an interdependent spirit are critical to gospel ministry.

Interestingly, Jesus' actions were out of the ordinary when compared to the regular work of a first-century rabbi. Other teachers weren't known for sending out their pupils as ambassadors.² They only gave freedom to teach after years of subordination and expert training. Jesus, on the contrary, knew He needed to prepare His disciples for His departure. In His mind, they would be the foundation upon which the Church was built (Ephesians 2:20 and Matthew 16:18).

Jesus' concern with preparing the Twelve was at the heart of the so called "Messianic Mystery." He was careful to evade death and keep His crucifixion on God's sovereign schedule (1:25 and 34), because He knew He needed time to get His rag-tag group of disciples ready for leadership. The first of the twelve disciples — Peter, Andrew, James, and John — were called to follow Jesus back in Mark 1:16-20. The calling of others is detailed in 3:13-19. Prior to our current passage, the Twelve have followed Jesus, learned from His teaching, and witnessed His miraculous deeds. Now Jesus specifically trains them to replicate His ministry. He models for us how one goes about accomplishing the mandate that has been given to the Church (Matthew 28:18-20). He gives a precedent for how the Church ought to do ministry in all generations (2 Timothy 2:2).

In describing the way in which Jesus commissioned His disciples, Mark used language that is translated "send them out." The original language contains the Greek word from which we get our word "apostle." It is terminology that was used of a political official sending out representatives on for an authorized mission.³ The apostles will return to Jesus in Mark 6:30. For now, it is important to notice the nature of their ministry. As they went out into surrounding villages, they served as official representatives for Christ. Though they were the only individuals to officially hold the office of apostle for all of Church history (Revelation 21:14), the spirit of their work carries on through the local Church (Ephesians 2:20 and 4:11-12). Now God's people are also called to represent Jesus in their workplaces, families, communities, and circles of influence.

Take note of the way in which the Lord sent the disciples out in pairs. There could be multiple meanings in the act. Maybe there is an allusion to the "pairs" of animals that exited the ark after the flood. Just as those creatures were commissioned to make a new earth, maybe the earliest disciples were portrayed as renewing humanity through gospel proclamation.

¹ Edwards, 176

² Edwards, 177.

³ Brooks, 101.

It is highly probable that there was an element of strategy in sending the disciples out in twos. Jesus' plan ensured ministry efficiency. He knew six groups could cover six regions of Galilee better than one large group.⁴

Another possible meaning of the pairs is this — under Mosaic Law at least two witnesses were required to guarantee the veracity of a report (Deuteronomy 19:15 and Matthew 18:19).⁵ Jesus likely sent His first disciples in this way as an affirmation of the veracity of His message.

Finally, Jesus likely paired them together because of the necessity of teamwork in the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-14). The pairing undoubtedly provided accountability, collaboration, and encouragement in ministry (Hebrews 10:24-25 and Proverbs 27:17). The Bible does say, "Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their efforts. For if either falls, his companion can lift him up; but pity the one who falls without another to lift him up" (Ecclesiastes 4:9).

It is important to note that the early Church was faithful to follow Jesus' instruction in this matter (see Acts 8:14 and 9:38).⁶ In Acts we read of how two ministers were sent out in a pair: "Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, a close friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then after they had fasted, prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them off" (Acts 13:1-3). If the early Church valued Jesus' method for world evangelism, shouldn't we. May we learn from the way of the Master. Teamwork, unity, collaboration, and encouragement are critical to ministry success.

Mark also highlights the way in which Jesus gave the Twelve "authority." The Koine Greek word translated authority also appears in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18). It is one that referred to "the power to decide" or "the right to determine a course of action." Jewish Law dictated that an official envoy could act with the same authority as the one who sent him.⁷ In our text, Mark uses an imperfect tense verb that depicts the disciples receiving power over and over again.⁸

Such authority is a key component of gospel ministry. As witnesses, we have been called to full represent King Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). Since we are His designated representatives, we have power from Him (Acts 1:8 and Romans 1:16). These realities give us great responsibility, but they also give us great relief. We have a power source and basis of authority apart from ourselves. The success of our mission is not dependent upon us. Furthermore, we have great assurance when we face rejection. Those who scoff at our message ultimately scoff at the one who sent us. In gospel ministry, we need not be exasperated or overwhelmed. We are simply envoys for Jesus, taking His good news to others. A successful witness is one who shares the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaves the results to God.⁹

⁴ Robertson, 308.

⁵ Schnabel, 137.

⁶ Schnabel, 138.

⁷ Ferguson, 83.

⁸ Robertson, 308.

⁹ Robinson, Darrell W. *People Sharing Jesus*. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), 7

In verse 7, the disciples' authority was directly related to their power over "unclean spirits." Jesus demonstrated His authority over the spirit world in 1:23; 1:32; 3:11; and 5:1-20. His power over Satan's minions was a sign and wonder (Hebrews 2:4) that proved His power over Satan and the fall (Genesis 3:1-7). As His official representatives, Jesus' disciples were given the same power as their teacher. When they returned with a report from their ministry efforts, they would give testimony of the way in which they were indeed able to cast out demons (Luke 10:17-20). Later, however, Mark will tell us of how they would lack the faith and power to perform the same feat again (Mark 9:18).

Verses 8 and 9

Verses 8 and 9 continue Mark's account of Jesus' commissioning of the Twelve: "He instructed them to take nothing for the road except a staff—no bread, no traveling bag, no money in their belts, but to wear sandals and not put on an extra shirt." It is important to note that Jesus' instructions here were intended specifically for His disciples and their ministry in first-century Galilee.¹⁰ Though there are principles for missions, ministry, and discipleship for us in our text, we shouldn't try to follow its words precisely, as if Jesus is giving textbook instruction for ministry in all generations.

In telling His disciples to "take nothing," Jesus meant to emphasize the way in which the disciples were to rely on the Lord for provision. The best ministers are often the ones who are most dependent upon God. In addition, the injunction was designed to make the disciples reliant upon the freewill generosity of God's people. Perhaps we see here a precedent for ministers and ministry throughout the Church Age. The Bible teaches that it is God's ideal for them to live by the gospel, to make a living off of their ministry labor (1 Corinthians 9:4). Such a paradigm is important for ministers, as a dependency upon the Lord for provision strengthens their faith. It is also important for local congregations, as it encourages them to practically value the ministry of the Word through their financial contributions.

In restricting what His disciples could take on their journey, Jesus prohibited several items. First, He told them not to take any "bread." The Twelve were to trust in charitable donations for their sustenance. This was in keeping with Scripture's teaching that ministers should have the opportunity to earn their daily food by their ministry efforts (2 Chronicles 31:4; 1 Corinthians 9:14; and 2 Thessalonians 3:9).

Jesus also told His disciples to take "no traveling bag." This popular accessory was often utilized by both men and women. Man purses aren't an invention of modern society! Usually the popular traveling bag was made out of the entire skin of a young animal. It would be sewn together in such a way that the outlines of the legs, arms, and head of the animal were still preserved. Usually, a leather handle was attached to the bag so that one could wear it over his or her shoulder.¹¹ In Jesus' mind, the Twelve did not need to carry such satchels. Doing so would tempt them to hoard supplies. They didn't need to store items, because they didn't need to become self-dependent. The Lord wanted them to stay reliant on continual support from God's people.

The Twelve weren't to take "money in their belts" either. First-century dress required that one wear a girdle around his or her waste (Ephesians 6:14). The garment was usually about a foot and a half in length. It served the purpose of securing the outer robe to one's body. This was necessary since the external robe was rather large, often being around seven feet in width. Sometimes one would pull up the outer robe and tuck it into the garment to facilitate running or hiking. The girdle also doubled as a money belt. A small pouch was sewn into the inside part of it

¹⁰ Schnabel, 139.

¹¹ Barclay, 142-143.

for the purpose of storing valuable coins and currency.¹² Jesus ordered His disciples to take no money in their girdles. He didn't want them to be financially independent, knowing that a posture of dependency would make them more powerful in ministry.

Notice Jesus instructed His disciples to not take an extra shirt. This was most likely the innermost garment, a sort of undershirt that was worn by first-century men. It covered the entire body and descended nearly to one's ankles. Over this shirt, one would wear an outer garment that was similar to a modern robe (John 21:7). The robe was main piece of clothing in one's wardrobe. It wasn't common for first-century people to have two of any piece of clothing. To have "extra" was often a sign of wealth.¹³ However, a lot of people at least had an extra undershirt. When one set out on a long journey, he or she might have worn two under shirts, so as to have an extra clean one. Jesus instructed His disciples to not follow that custom. He wanted them to live by faith, and to be dependent on God's people to meet their needs.

Though the Lord wanted His disciples to be dependent upon the Father, and the generosity of God's people, He did instruct them to take some items. First, He told them to carry "a staff" (Mark 6:8). He spoke of a wooden rod used for protection against animals or humans, if need be.¹⁴ It was common equipment for a first-century traveller.¹⁵ Next, Jesus told the Twelve to "wear sandals." In the first century, such footwear was made out of some type of hard material that served as a sole. Leather straps were attached to this sole and used to fasten it to the feet. Such sandals weren't always worn, but they were certainly needed in the situation at hand. To reach remote villages with the gospel, the disciples would need to travel over many rocky paths.¹⁶

It is worth noting that some see an allusion to the Exodus within Jesus' instructions in verses 8 and 9. From Exodus 12:11, we learn that the Israelites were instructed to be equipped with a staff and sandals on the night of the first Passover. Perhaps Jesus' instructions insinuate that the disciples had a hand in launching a new sort of Exodus. They were sent to liberate Gentiles from the slavery and suffering of sin.¹⁷

All in all, Jesus' instruction concerning His disciples' travel methods provides important principles for gospel ministry in all generations. We shouldn't think that we are required to follow the Lord's words with exactitude and precision. Obviously Jesus didn't intend people of all ages to follow His words literally. Most modern readers don't own a staff, and they don't wear a first-century girdle.

Instead, Christ's words are intended to enforce certain priorities for gospel advancement in all generations. First, they show that those who share the gospel should stay dependent on Christ.¹⁸ His power is what gives evangelistic success. Those who seek to make a difference for His kingdom should stay reliant on His empowerment. Did not Jesus say, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses..." (Acts 1:8)? No witness will succeed without the power of Christ's presence.

¹² Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 79.

¹³ Robertson, 309.

¹⁴ Schnabel, 138.

¹⁵ Robertson, 308.

¹⁶ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 79.

¹⁷ Edwards, 180.

¹⁸ Brooks, 101.

Second, Jesus' prohibitions show that gospel witnesses should live a simple life so that they don't unnecessarily become encumbered with worldly pursuits. Those who have their eyes on worldly affairs usually aren't good witnesses for Jesus. Paul spoke of this reality when writing to Timothy. He said, "No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in the concerns of civilian life; he seeks to please the commanding officer" (2 Timothy 2:4). Jesus encouraged His followers to not become too infatuated with worldly pursuits in Matthew 6:31-33. If we want to be used to lead others to Christ, His kingdom must be first in our hearts. Money and material things are not evil. They are amoral and unspiritual, but they can become evil when they become more important than Christ's kingdom. May those who minister in the twenty-first century be on guard against "the deceitfulness of wealth" (Mark 4:19).

Verse 10

In verse 10, Jesus gave instruction concerning how the disciples were to relate to the people to whom they ministered. He said, "Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that place." To understand the meaning of Jesus' instruction, it is necessary to know a little about first-century customs. Norms related to hospitality and hosting visitors were a lot different than they are now. When arriving at a foreign city, travelers didn't seek out accommodations. The burden was upon the residents of that town. Villagers were expected to look out for visitors and make them feel welcome (Judges 19:12-16). Accommodations, food, and lodging were not the responsibility of the traveller.¹⁹

Jesus instructed His disciples to follow cultural convention. If a home welcomed the disciples, they were to "stay there until" they "left" the town. With His command, Jesus once again emphasized the importance of dependency on Christ and contentment in gospel ministry. The disciples were to trust in God's people to meet their needs. And they were to be satisfied with whatever they were given. Even when living conditions were less than ideal, the disciples weren't to seek better accommodations.²⁰

There was another lesson in Jesus' instruction however. In telling the Twelve to look out for hospitable hosts, the Lord also revealed a secret of missionary work that remains to this day. When ministering in any context, ministers, missionaries, and members of the body of Christ must be on the look out for people who are friendly, and potentially receptive to the message and messengers of Christ. In Luke 10:6, Jesus referred to an individual who is hospitable to gospel heralds as "a person of peace."

To be effective in evangelism, disciples must be on the lookout for those who seem open to the things of Christ. Searching for such people is half the battle in missions. One modern missionary has commented: "There may be hardened people groups, but in every one there are harvestable individuals! You may have to work to find the harvest, but it is there. In some contexts, perhaps one out of every ten or twenty lost people is a prepared person of peace... while in other contexts it could be one out of a hundred or thousand."²¹ If disciples want to be effective in spreading the gospel, they must learn how to prayerfully find the people who are receptive to Jesus.

¹⁹ Barclay, 143.

²⁰ Brooks, 102.

²¹ Smith, Steve and Ying Kai. *T4T: A Discipleship ReRevolution*. (Monument, CO: WIGTake Resources, 2011), 83.

Verse 11

Disciples must also be skillful at overlooking skeptics. Jesus told the Twelve, “If any place does not welcome you or listen to you, when you leave there, shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them” (Mark 6:11). The Lord’s advice was pertinent in light of the events in the preceding passage (6:1-6). Because of the hostility Jesus had already faced (Mark 3:6), it was to be expected that His disciples would encounter similar resistance.

The act of shaking dust off of one’s feet was a custom amongst ancient Jews. When one left a Gentile region, he or she shook the unclean soil of the land off of their feet. It was a way of deeming a certain town as heathen territory.²² By prescribing this custom for early gospel ministry, Jesus indicated that first-century Jews would by-and-large reject Him. In shaking dust off of their feet, the disciples would demonstrate that their fellow Jews were really no better off than Gentiles. The early Church followed Jesus’ injunction (Acts 15:19).

In the end, the act was symbolic of judgment to come. Jesus said it would be a “testimony against” those who rejected the gospel. The King James Version makes this more clear through the addition of the declaration, “It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city.” The disciples’ act of shaking dust off their feet was a witness of the judgment that would one day fall on those who rejected their message.²³ Those who snubbed their noses at the gospel were no better than Gentiles (Romans 2:28-29), and they would one day give an account for their unbelief (Revelation 20:11-15).

In ministering the gospel, disciples will always encounter resistance. Not everyone will believe. In fact, the vast majority will reject the gospel. Evangelists must not lose heart. They should prepare themselves for rejection. In addition, they should have a confidence in Christ, knowing that all gospel-rejecters will soon face the wrath of God. While there is often a temptation to be fearful of rejection, such knowledge will produce pity towards spiritually stubborn people.

Verse 12

After receiving training from Jesus, the disciples “went out and preached that people should repent” (Mark 6:12). They began to “fish for people” as He had initially had called them to do (Mark 1:17). The word translated “preached” in verse 12 is a word that was used of a herald’s announcement. In the first-century world, official envoys were known for going from town to town, making announcements on behalf of important rulers and dignitaries. Such is a fitting picture of the Christian evangelist. He is tasked with simply making an announcement. His message doesn’t emanate from himself, he simply relays what has been given to him.²⁴

As we aim to fulfill the Great Commission, let’s be mindful of the nature of our task. We are called to simply announce the good news of Jesus. Our job isn’t complex; it is rather straightforward. We don’t need to invent a message, nor do we need to overly burden ourselves with making Christ’s message palatable to twenty-first century culture. Though there are many means and methods for fulfilling our mission, our mission remains the same — share the good news with as many people as we can!

It is important to take note of the exact message the disciples proclaimed. Mark says they announced “that people should repent.” At the heart of their message was a message of repentance. This was in keeping with the preaching of Jesus (1:15). It also echoed the preaching

²² Edwards, 181.

²³ Schnabel, 139.

²⁴ Barclay, 144.

of John the Baptist (Matthew 3:2).²⁵ To “repent” means “to change” or “to turn.” William Barclay has said, “To repent means to change one’s mind and then to fit one’s action to this change. Repentance means a change of heart and a change of action.”²⁶

Repentance isn’t a message many like to hear. As a result, many modern preachers and Christians are renegeing on this aspect of Christ’s message. They have crafted an easy-believeism that has little element of conviction. Out of a fear of hurting or offending people, they have concocted a diluted gospel message in hopes of winning more to Christ.

We should be aware that the message of repentance is what makes people see their need to believe. It is the motivating force that drives one to faith. Sure, the call to repent may wound one’s ego, but one will not see his or her need for faith if he or she doesn’t see the need to change. If modern preachers and witnesses want to gain genuine converts, they should be careful to include a message of repentance in all of their appeals. J.C. Ryle has said, “We must bid men repent, if would walk in the steps of the apostles.”²⁷ Our message isn’t “Give your heart to Jesus” or “Invite Jesus into your heart.” Our message is “Repent and believe in Jesus.” We are shortsighted if we seek to change Bible terminology out of pragmatic concern. The gospel contains power that produces salvation (Romans 1:16). When we utter biblical concepts, regardless of whether they appeal to modern sentiments, we unleash the power of God that has power to convert.

Verse 13

Mark concludes his description of the disciples’ missionary efforts by saying, “They drove out many demons, anointed many sick people with oil and healed them” (Mark 6:13). The act of driving out demons was in keeping with Jesus’ commissioning back in verse 7. By exercising power over evil spirits, the disciples demonstrated the way in which the gospel has the ability to overthrow Satan’s sway over humanity (Genesis 3:1-7). It is for this reason that Jesus frequently performed miraculous works in reference to the spirit world (Mark 1:21-28 and 1:32-34).

In addition to casting out demons, the disciples also “anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.” The catholic doctrine of extreme unction is drawn from our passage.²⁸ The oil used by the disciples was olive oil. In Jesus’ day, it was commonly used for medical treatments, and it was often administered both internally and externally to the sick.²⁹ Applied topically, it was thought to heal cuts, lesions, burns, and headaches. Scripture never records our Lord using olive oil in His healings, but it does record the use of it in early churches (James 5:14). Jesus never had to use olive oil, because He healed directly. He didn’t need medicine or medical techniques to help Him.³⁰

Though often a medicinal treatment (Luke 10:34 and James 5:14), it seems there is a dual meaning in our text. Oil was often a symbol of the Holy Spirit for the Jew. It represented the presence of God because of its association with the lamp in the temple (Exodus 27:20). The disciples likely healed through the power of the Christ, but they applied oil to help with healing, and to represent the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. We are reminded that God’s people

²⁵ Robertson, 309.

²⁶ Barclay, 145.

²⁷ Ryle, 91.

²⁸ Ryle, 92.

²⁹ Robertson, 310.

³⁰ Schnabel, 139.

should seek medical treatment when in need, but they should ultimately trust the Lord for healing. In times of sickness, Christians have help from both God and doctors.³¹

The disciples' acts of casting out demons and healing with oil were loaded with important meaning. They were given such power to prove that they were true messengers from the Lord. In keeping with Exodus 4:1-3, messengers who share direct revelation from the Lord are given signs and wonders as a token of validation. The Jews should have paid attention to the Twelve when they saw such miracles. It was the Lord's plan to testify to the truthfulness of the apostles "by signs and wonders, various miracles, and distributions of gifts from the Holy Spirit according to his will" (Hebrews 2:4).

Nowadays disciples shouldn't expect to perform such signs and wonders. Sign gifts were only designed to accompany the work of the apostles (Hebrews 2:4), and there were only twelve apostles for all of time (Revelation 21:14). The apostles had a foundational ministry through which they helped establish the church (Ephesians 2:20). Since they were dispensers of new revelation, the Lord accompanied their ministry with signs and wonders. Now we are messengers who are commissioned to carry on the ministry of the apostles (Ephesians 4:11-14). Though we may not produce signs and wonders, we should demonstrate spiritual fruit that gives great glory to Jesus (Galatians 5:22 and Matthew 5:13-16).

³¹ Robertson, 310.