

Dr. David Turner, Matthew

Lecture 5A – Matthew 10: Mission to Israel, the Second Discourse

Greetings, friends. This is David Turner, and this is Lecture 5A of the Matthew class. We've now come to the second discourse in the Gospel of Matthew, the Mission Discourse, where our Lord Jesus commissions His disciples for their ministries, gives them their instructions, and sends them forth.

The Sermon on the Mount was the first discourse, of course. It ended with a comment on the authority of Jesus. Matthew 8 and 9 carefully selected events from Jesus' ministry, His miracles, and interspersed those miracles with discipleship stories.

And now the disciples are commissioned to go out and carry on their own ministries as those who are trying to be workers in the harvest field, as our Lord mentioned at the end of Matthew 9. So now we begin our lecture with attempting to grasp the structure of this discourse. First of all, it's literary context. Matthew comprises the second discourse of Jesus featured by Matthew.

The discourse proper begins after 10:1-5A, which summarizes the commissioning of the apostles, and it lists them individually. This concludes with Matthew's characteristic transitional formula at 11:1, just like the Sermon on the Mount concluded with the formula, and when it happened that Jesus had finished all these sayings. So you compare 7:28 and 11:1, you begin to notice a key structural feature of Matthew.

The Twelve have seen Jesus' words and works. Now it's their turn to go out on their own itinerant ministries as He continues His own ministry, 11:1. Up to this point in the narrative, Jesus has demonstrated kingdom authority through His words and through His work, through message and miracle, and now He delegates this kingdom ministry to the Twelve for their own mission to Israel, 10.1.5-8. They are to extend Jesus' ministry by announcing the kingdom and demonstrating its power to Israel through mighty works. The chapter includes the setting of the discourse, 10:1-5a, and then it is followed by instructions on the audience and message of the mission, 10:5b-8, support for the mission, 10:9-15, and dealing with persecution and suffering, 10:16-42. Now, once we have placed the discourse in its literary context in Matthew, it also behooves us to look at the literary structure of the discourse itself.

You're looking in your supplemental materials as you listen to the tape, I hope, at page 22 where we have the outline of the lecture. Also, notice page 23 where we list

Davies and Allison's approach to the structure of the passage. I have that before you, as you think with me here now.

As there are many different views of the structure of the discourse, it's rather clear that it's not as clear in terms of the structure as the Sermon on the Mount was. The structure of the Sermon on the Mount does seem to be fairly straightforward, but it's much more difficult to try to understand how this discourse fits together here. Davies and Allison's chiastic approach, that is to say, an approach which sets up the discourse like the Greek letter chi and X shape, is not totally convincing.

But there is a certain symmetry in that after the initial instructions in verses 5-10, which have to do with the audience and message of the mission, along with some comments about its support, the emphasis falls on whether the kingdom will be received or rejected. There seems to be a block of material on it being received at the beginning, verses 11-13 of the chapter, where the discussion is about blessings on worthy houses and worthy towns, followed by two sections on rejection. First, a general rejection, verses 14 and 15, and then some specific situations in which there will be rejection, verses 16-39.

Warnings that amongst the rejecters will be courts, synagogues, governors, and kings, and even the hardest one of all to deal with, one's own family. But even this lengthy section in 10:16-39 contains more than just material about the gospel being rejected. In the middle of these warnings about the gospel being rejected, there are promises that Jesus will care for his disciples during those times of rejection, such as chapter 10, verse 19, don't worry about what you should speak because verse 20 of the Spirit of the Father will speak in you.

And additionally, in verses 24 and following, our Lord says to us that we should not be surprised if we're rejected because he was rejected, and a disciple is not above his teacher. So, the material on rejection in verses 16-39 does contain some specific warnings, but it also contains some encouragements so that we'll be able to deal with the problem. Then, finally, the discourse concludes, verses 40-42, on a positive note again, with the notion of rewards for those who receive Jesus' followers and help them out, even with such a little thing as a cup of cold water.

So, the discourse is not as clearly structured as you might think, and it is a bit difficult to try to put it all together, but as you read it, it is a very clear and a very sobering instruction on what the church will face as it goes out. It's clear as you read the discourse that it is related primarily to the ministry of Jesus' original followers, his disciples, to the cities of Israel. That's pretty clear there in 10-23, as well as the comment that the disciples are not to go to the Gentiles but only to the lost sheep of Israel.

That would be in 10 verses 5 and 6. So the discourse is related primarily to the ministry of Jesus' original disciples to Israel, but there are indications that it speaks to the ongoing world mission of the church at large. There are references to appearing before Gentile rulers and to the necessity of perseverance until Judgment Day. Notice 10:18, 22:26, and 28.

Thus, the discourse envisions additional history and additional time, and therefore has relevance to the church today. The fact that the modern Western church has not experienced widespread persecution of the sort mentioned in this discourse should not blind Western Christians to the profound truths presented here. Now let's look at Matthew 10:1-4 and see the commission which our Lord gave his original disciples and the list of them there.

Jesus has just emphasized to his disciples the need for his mission, and he has commanded them to pray for workers for the harvest in 9:37, and 38. Now his commission amounts to putting feet to their prayers. The needy multitudes of Israel must be reached with the redeeming power of God's rule, and the disciples here receive the authority to minister as Jesus has ministered himself in words and deeds.

In the discourse to come, the disciples are repeatedly reminded that their fortunes will be inescapably linked to their allegiance to Jesus. As they continue their ministry of the kingdom, word, and deed, they will experience a mixed response to their message, which centers on their identity. If they are rejected and persecuted, he is rejected and persecuted.

See 10:14, 18:22, 24, and 25. If they are received, he is received. See 10:40.

And so, it is today. It's instructive to note that those apostles who are mentioned elsewhere in Matthew are not necessarily portrayed in a positive light. Judas is the best example of this.

The sons of Zebedee mentioned here are complicit in their mother's selfish petition that they be the greatest in the coming kingdom. In chapter 20, verses 20 to 22, Peter's foibles are famous. Yet when he confesses Jesus' identity, he becomes foundational for the church.

It's clear that in the plan of God, Jesus constructs his church with imperfect building materials. It's humbling to acknowledge that the earliest leaders of the church were redeemed, though flawed individuals. But at the same time, this attributes the credit where it belongs to Jesus.

Check what Paul said along those lines in 2 Corinthians 4:7. Yet the 12 are the human agents upon whom Jesus will build the church. They are crucial for the continuity between the pre- and post-resurrection ministries of Jesus, and they'll be the

eschatological rulers of Israel according to 19:28. Now I move on to chapter 10, verses 5 through 15, which we've called on the outline general instructions.

The instructions in 10:5 through 15 deal with the destination of the message, the miracles that the disciples are empowered to do, the outfit that they're to take with them, and the reception that they might expect. Verses 5b, and 6 deal with this destination, Israel alone. The message in 10:7 is preached that the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

The miracles that are mentioned in 10:8, healing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing the lepers, casting out the demons, the outfit, which is rather minimal, not taking a lot of coins, verse 9, or even two changes of clothes, rather assuming that those who receive the message will support the disciples in verses 9 and 10. And in verses 11 through 15, you have just the idea that when people are receptive to the message, they'll take you in and care for you, and if they're not, they won't take you in and care for you. So, as we read this, we're struck with a continuity of the disciples' mission with that of Jesus and John, as well as by the comparative lack of funds and equipment that the disciples are to take.

This last feature reminds believers today that their ultimate resource and ministry is the Lord's power and promises, not their own provisions. Similarly, the simplicity of Jesus' provisions for the disciples here tends to reflect negatively upon the fundraising techniques and lavish accoutrements which are in vogue with certain ministries today. The prohibition of ministry to non-Jews in 10:5 is perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of 10:5 to 15.

This prohibition is obviously quite different than the concluding commission of this gospel, which mandates mission to all the nations, 28:18. How should this major difference be understood? The priority of Israel in God's covenant plan cannot be minimized. Matthew presents Jesus as the son of Abraham through whom all the nations will be blessed in 1:1 compared to Genesis 12:2, and 3. Although mere physical descent from Abraham does not merit God's favor, and that's what John said in 3:9, and notice also 8:12, the Jews still remain the foundational covenant people of God, and eschatological blessing amounts to sharing in promises made to the patriarchs, notice 8:11, and 19:28.

Thus, the Gentile world mission does not replace the foundational ministry to Israel, but it supplements and broadens it. Christianity must not be separated from its roots in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Judaism. Christianity is not a religion primarily, let alone exclusively for the Gentiles.

The particularism of 10:5 is necessary for Jesus to be the fulfillment of Israel's history and prophetic hope. His disciples become the nucleus and the foundational leaders for the newborn church, compare 16:28, 19:28, and 21:43. In God's mysterious plan,

most Jews then and now, sadly, do not accept Jesus as their promised Messiah, but both then and now, a messianic remnant of Christian Jews remains.

Therefore, Gentile Christians must always acknowledge the priority of Israel in redemptive history. This was taught by Jesus and Paul alike. Notice some other passages, John 4:22, 10:16, Romans 11:16-24, 15:7-12, and Ephesians 2:11-13.

Thus, there is a sense yet today in which to the Jew first still rings true, as Paul put it in Romans 1:16. Now we move on to the warnings and encouragement about persecution found in chapter 10, verses 16-23. 10:16-23 contains two cycles of warning and encouragement.

The first warns of persecution from religious courts and civil rulers, 10:16-18. It seems to me most likely that when it says in 10:17, they'll deliver you up to the courts, that that would be the Jewish courts, as they were called back then, Beit Din, House of Judgment, rabbinical courts, in other words, who would examine the apostles, the disciples, as to whether their message was in keeping with Judaism or not. And also it says in their synagogues.

I think both of those are probably Jewish, in a Jewish setting. So, the disciples will be persecuted by official Judaism. Nevertheless, they are encouraged by the work of the Spirit in their lives.

The Spirit will speak through them in these dire circumstances in 10:19, and 20. That's the first cycle. The second cycle warns of what is almost unthinkable, betrayal by one's own family, 10:21.

That's probably the hardest thing to swallow here for all of us. And this cycle encourages the disciples by stressing the coming of Jesus, who will save those who remain faithful to the end, according to chapter 10 and verse 23. Now, the coming of Jesus here in 10:23 is one of the more difficult passages in the whole Gospel of Matthew.

There are, I would say, five plausible views of this. First, the coming of Jesus in 10:23 could conceivably mean that Jesus will soon, shall we say, follow up on the ministry of the disciples. He'll be following them around, as it were, the cities.

In this view, this coming, quote unquote, is not an eschatological coming, but it simply refers to Jesus rejoining the disciples before they complete their immediate ministries to the villages of Israel. A second plausible view is that Jesus' resurrection amounts to a coming, since by the resurrection of Jesus, the new era of the church would be inaugurated. There are scholars who will take that view.

A third possibility is that the coming of Jesus is a process beginning with the resurrection, continuing on through the day of Pentecost, perhaps having something to do with the judgment that fell upon Israel in 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, but ultimately culminating when Jesus does literally return to the earth. The famous Reformed commentator William Hendrickson takes that view in his commentary on Matthew. A fourth view would be that the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 amounts to a coming judgment upon Israel.

People like Carson and Hagner stress the importance of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 as the coming of Christ in judgment, even though he personally did not return to the earth. Finally, a fifth view is that in 1023, Jesus is teaching the disciples as a whole, not the original disciples alone, but the disciples as representatives of the church at large, that before the church completes its mission to Israel, Jesus will again return to the earth. Among those who take that view would be Davies and Allison in their magisterial commentary, Blomberg, Gundry, and Daniel Harrington in the series *Sacra Pagina* volume on Matthew.

Now, choosing between one of these five views is not easy. One's decision must be made with three matters in mind. First, one's view of other texts in Matthew where the coming of Jesus is mentioned, such as 16:28, 24:30, 44, 25:31, and 26:64.

Presumably, when one compares all these texts, a consistent picture would emerge. Second, at least some of these coming texts depend on Daniel 7:13, where we have the picture of the Son of Man appearing before the Ancient of Days, and we have to look at that passage as well. Third, we have to decide whether Jesus' mission discourse in Matthew 10 describes solely the original mission of the 12, or whether, in some places, it anticipates and envisions the later mission of the post-resurrection church.

Taking all those things together and trying to weigh it all in the balances, it seems best to me at least, when all these things are considered, to opt for this last view that I mentioned, that Jesus is speaking here not simply to his original disciples, but to the church at large, and saying that before the church completes its mission to Israel, he will return to the earth. But I don't believe we can be certain about this interpretation. Jesus' mission discourse does anticipate the mission of the church throughout the period between the first and second comings of Jesus, and that mission includes ongoing mission to Israel during the outreach to all the nations envisioned in Matthew 28, verses 18-20.

Now, the next section of the discourse on mission, 10:24-33. In chapter 10, verses 24-33, the major idea is that in view of the rejection that will come to the disciples, Jesus tells them not to fear. He forbids fear. As we might think, it's easier said than done, not to be afraid, but this section provides three reasons why the disciples should not fear the prospect of persecution.

First, disciples are reminded that as servants of the Master Jesus, they are not above him, and that they are to be like him. As his servants, then, they will share by the persecutors. 10:24-25. As the narrative proceeds and the opposition to Jesus intensifies, culminating in the Passion Week disputes with the Jewish leaders, the disciples presumably grasp this teaching more fully.

Second, since they share in Jesus' treatment, they need not fear because they will also share in Jesus' vindication. 10:26-27. Later, they can look back from a post-resurrection perspective, as Matthew the author does, and realize that the resurrection vindicated Jesus, and that his return will vindicate them. At that time, all the hidden things will be revealed.

Third, the disciples should not fear persecutors, but the one to whom both they and the persecutors will answer on Judgment Day. 10:28-33. The ordeal inflicted by the persecutors is only temporary, but the persecutors themselves will suffer an eternal punishment. Disciples who acknowledge Jesus will be acknowledged by Jesus before the Father.

The persecutors who deny Jesus will be denied by him before the Father. Thus, the disciple can deal with fear by recalling their shared identity with Jesus, by focusing on his return, and by maintaining their awe of God. Matthew 10:28 is frequently cited in the current theological debate, which pits the notion of annihilationism, sometimes called conditional immortality, against the traditional Christian teaching of eternal punishment.

This was not a matter with which Matthew was concerned, but it's a common question today. The issue hinges on 10:28b, where God is described as the one who can destroy both body and soul in hell. Those who hold to annihilationism or conditional immortality take the word destroy, which is the Greek word *apolumi*, quite literally, and they posit a final judgment where believers are destroyed, which is to say they cease to exist.

But it is clear from other texts that this so-called destruction is a state of punishment for the whole person. Compare Matthew 5:22, 5:29, 30, 18:9, 23:15, 33. This state of punishment for the whole person is just as eternal in duration as the bliss of eternal life in God's kingdom.

Compare 25:41 with 25:46, and also look at the Old Testament text which is the background for this, Daniel 12:2, and other New Testament texts such as John 5:29, Acts 24:15, 2 Thessalonians 1:9, Revelation 14:10, Revelation 20:10, 20:15, and 20:18. Now academic arguments about whether or not there is a hell can get us off track here and get us into the matter of intellectual pride. We think we can win the argument, but as one of my seminary profs used to say, we shouldn't speak of hell

unless we have tears rolling down our cheeks. That may not always be easy for all of us to cry on demand, and that's not what God requires of us.

But the point is that the matter of eternal punishment is, to say the least, a fearful doctrine. It's one that ought to move us in awe and in concern about the lost. But the fact that this is an awesome doctrine does not mean it's a doctrine that we should easily omit or diminish, because it's precisely the motivation given in Matthew 10 for fidelity and discipleship during days of persecution, according to 10:22, 28, and 33.

But to put it bluntly, if there were no hell to avoid, there would be one less reason to be faithful to Jesus, and there would be one more reason to deny Him. Well, let's move on to 10:34-42, the last major section of the discourse. In this section, Jesus' message confronts old relationships, and we are told that there may be difficulties with our earthly relatives, and at the same time, it creates new relationships.

Jesus' second discourse moves to its conclusion with a warning that both He and His kingdom message will not automatically bring peace to the earth. Indeed, the most sacred human relationships could possibly be severed by His message. Thus, even one's family cannot take precedence over one's allegiance to Jesus.

This difficult teaching is made even more so when one considers the importance of the family in the Hebrew Bible. Look at such passages as Exodus 20:12, 21:17, Leviticus 20:9, Deuteronomy 5:16, and in the teaching of Jesus elsewhere. Look at Matthew 15:4-6, 19:8-9, 19.

So, Jesus and the Old Testament stress the importance of allegiance and loyalty and honoring one's parents. But there is something that takes precedence even over that. One's allegiance to Jesus and to His followers can cause such dissension in a family that one's family relationships have to be severed.

Not something that one would seek to have occur, but one's first allegiance is to Jesus, and one's first family is the community of believers. Such a severing of one's natural family relationships will no doubt bring deep anguish. I know what that is like, and perhaps some of you do as well.

But that temporary pain must be compared with the horror of eternal separation from Jesus. Jesus' own example shows that one's loyalties must lie with the new family of His followers. 12:46-50. Compare John 7:3-9. Jesus promises that the pain of lost relationships in the present life will somehow be offset by the blessings of the future kingdom in 19:29. The discourse as a whole ends on a positive note, and after the discussion on hell and possible betrayal by the family I can use a positive note, and it does end on one in 10:40-42 with the prospect of reward for those who show hospitality to Jesus' disciples.

It's important to remember that it takes more than missionaries to accomplish Jesus' mission. The whole community must be involved in the mission. Those who support the missionaries will receive an equivalent reward.

After the sobering words about the inevitability of persecution, even from one's own family, this conclusion provides a note of balance which encourages disciples in their mission. Despite the difficulties of the coming days, they will find hospitable people who will respond positively to the message of Jesus and the kingdom. But the conclusion of this discourse is not unlike that of the Sermon on the Mount.

Both discourses present loyalty to Jesus and his kingdom in blunt either/or language. According to Matthew 7:24-27, one's house is built either on rock or on sand. There is either obedience to the teaching of Jesus or disobedience.

According to 10:39, one's life will either be lost or it'll be found. One will either confess or one will deny Jesus. No doubt some try to find ways of compromise so that disciples may have both family and Jesus, both what we might call self-actualization and discipleship.

But for Jesus, there is no such middle ground. It's either one or the other. If push comes to shove and one's family says it's either Jesus or us, disciples have no choice.

They have to follow Jesus. Now just to pause and reflect briefly on this discourse in Matthew chapter 10, one would have to say that when you read it from the standpoint of perhaps a western Christian, a citizen of the United States of America, a middle class type of person like me at least, a lot of this does not really sound all that realistic because many of us as Christians in the United States and in much of the western world have never had to suffer along the lines that Jesus speaks of here. But who knows what can happen in the future, and perhaps this will change.

At the same time, when we read this, we have to be knowledgeable of the fact that many of our brothers and sisters around the world today are experiencing great persecution for their faith in Christ. If we are up on the history of the church, we'll know that in the past, as well, believers in Jesus have often suffered horrendous persecutions for their testimony for him. We need to be more sensitized as Western Christians to church history as a whole, the sufferings of believers in the past, as well as the sufferings of believers around the world even today.

Hopefully, Matthew 10 will sort of shock us out of our provincial sort of serendipitous view that everything is always on the up and up and looking better and better for Christians. The fact is, our Lord was treated poorly by many people on this earth, and if we dare to speak his name, that could conceivably be our fate as well. And may he give us strength to endure it if it is, and may his spirit give us the words to say as he promised here.