

Dr. Craig Keener, Matthew, Session 11,

Matthew 10-11

6-min. Video Overview

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Alright, today we're jumping into one of the most intense and, well, kind of confusing mission briefings you'll ever find. We're talking Matthew chapters 10 and 11. Let's really dig into this.

I mean, think about that for a second. It's a job description that sounds completely impossible, right? But this is exactly what Jesus lays out for his followers in Matthew 10 and 11. It's this incredibly radical mission, and the stakes could not be higher.

And when you really start to understand it, you see this massive paradox at the very heart of his teaching. So our story really kicks off with a problem of scale. Jesus is looking out at these huge crowds, and what he sees is a world full of people who are just lost, vulnerable.

The text says they're like sheep without a shepherd. And the need? It's just way, way too big for one person to handle alone. And he gets it.

He realizes that his work can't just be about adding one person here or there. No, it has to multiply. It has to be exponential.

He needs a team, a whole crew of workers who can take this mission way beyond where he can physically go. So what does he do? He commissions 12 disciples. And let me tell you, that number is not random.

It's chosen very deliberately. It's this powerful symbol meant to bring to mind the 12 tribes of Israel. It's a signal that his mission is about restoring God's people right from the very foundation.

And then, he gives them a brand new title—apostle. And you've got to understand, this is a huge promotion. The Greek word here is apostelos, and it means so much more than just being a follower or a student.

It means you're a sent one—an official messenger, an agent who has been given the full authority of the person who sent you. Pretty serious stuff. Now, the job description that comes with this new title is where things get really counterintuitive.

The apostles are given some highly unusual rules for the road. So on the one hand, Jesus gives them this incredible spiritual authority—I mean, the power to heal people, to proclaim the kingdom of God. But on the other hand? He tells them they have to travel with basically nothing.

Seriously. No money, no extra shirt, not even a bag to carry stuff in. It's an extreme command.

And just to give you some context here, this was even more radical than the Cynic philosophers at the time. Now, these guys were known for being extreme minimalists. But even they carried a bag for the essentials.

What Jesus is asking for forces a level of dependence that was just unheard of. This isn't just about living simply. No, this is a crash course in absolute total trust.

Trust that God's going to provide for you, but only through the hospitality of complete strangers. But, and this is a big but, this mission of total trust came with an equally total and unavoidable cost. There was no fine print here.

The danger was part of the deal. Yet, Jesus does not sugarcoat this part. At all.

He tells them flat out, hey, I'm sending you out like sheep among wolves. Notice that. He's not just saying they might run into danger.

He's saying he is actively sending them right into the middle of it, as vulnerable as you can possibly be. And he gets super specific about what this is going to look like. We're talking about public floggings, being dragged in front of governors and kings.

And maybe the worst part, being betrayed by your own family members. He's promising them a future filled with social rejection and real physical pain. And then, then he drops the line that would have just stopped everyone in their tracks.

See, when Jesus says, take up your cross, we have to remember what his audience heard. They didn't picture a nice little necklace. No.

They pictured the single most shameful, horrifying public spectacle they knew. They pictured a condemned criminal, stripped naked, beaten bloody, forced to haul the heavy wooden beam of their own execution through the streets while people screamed at them. That's the image.

So he was demanding a loyalty that was bigger than your love for your own family, bigger even than your instinct to just stay alive. Now this whole reality, this completely unexpected and difficult mission, it was so jarring that it threw even John the Baptist for a loop. Remember, this is the guy who announced Jesus was coming.

And now, sitting in a prison cell, he starts to have a major crisis of faith. So from his jail cell, he sends his own followers to ask Jesus this really shocking question. He's been hearing reports about what Jesus is doing, all the healings, all the teaching.

And instead of being encouraged, he's filled with doubt because, you know, this just isn't what he thought the Messiah's arrival would look like. And Jesus' answer is, well, it's brilliant. It's indirect, but so powerful.

He doesn't just say, yep, it's me. Instead, he points to the proof. He basically says, just go back and tell John what you're seeing with your own eyes and hearing with your own ears.

And then he lists off these very specific miracles that happen to be direct fulfillments of prophecies from the book of Isaiah. So you see, these weren't just random acts of power or kindness. Every single one was a specific prophetic signpost.

It's like Jesus was telling John, hey, look at the signs, the stuff that was promised for the future. It's starting to break into the present right now. This is a little taste of the world that's coming.

And here's the real kicker. John, like a lot of people, was expecting a Messiah who would show up with an ax ready to bring fiery judgment. Instead, Jesus shows up with healing hands for the outcasts and the broken.

His mission just didn't fit the script anybody had written. And because of that, it became what the text calls a stumbling block, a reason for confusion and doubt, even for someone as great as John the Baptist. Okay, so after all of that, the extreme costs, the confusing mission, Jesus wraps it all up.

Not with another hard command, but with this profound, gentle invitation. He then makes this pretty wild claim. He says that the really deep truths about God's kingdom were actually hidden from the so-called experts, you know, the wise and learned who are trying to debate and analyze everything.

Instead, who were they revealed to? To little children. And he doesn't mean actual kids, but people who come to God with a simple, dependent trust. And finally, he offers rest.

And he uses this image of a yoke, which, you know, is a heavy wooden harness for an ox, a tool for hard labor. Jewish teachers at the time would talk about taking on the yoke of the law. But Jesus, speaking as if he is divine wisdom, offers something totally different.

He says, take my yoke. He's inviting people into a whole new way of living with him, one that doesn't lead to a crushing burden, but to deep, genuine rest for your soul. And that just brings us full circle, right back to the central paradox we've been looking at.

The mission demands everything from you literally. Your money, your safety, your reputation, even your life. And yet, what does it offer? Everything that matters.

Rest for your soul. So it leaves us with this final thought to chew on. What if true strength isn't found where we usually look for it? In power and preparation, but in radical trust and a willingness to bear the ultimate cost?