

# Matthew 10: Jesus *and* His Disciples



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Lev. 25:8–54, Matthew 10, John 10:10.*

**Memory Text:** “So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.” (*Matthew 10:31, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** Jesus, the world's greatest Teacher, gave His disciples instructions before sending them out to witness. What principles can we take from His words for ourselves today?

Jesus knew that an important part of His task was to train a group of His followers to continue His mission. So now, after touring Galilee—preaching, teaching, and healing—He knew it was time to send out His 12 disciples on their first assignment. They were to receive their first practical experience.

The disciples had received a highly specialized education from the greatest Teacher the world has ever known. They had seen in Jesus—in living action—the principles on which the universe is founded. They had seen the ultimate model of how human beings should live.

The disciples had been with Jesus for only a year or so. But they had walked and talked with the One who was, Himself, the Way, the Truth, and the Life (*John 14:6*). The time had finally come to put into practice what they had learned. Before Jesus sent out the disciples, He gave them special instruction.

This week we will explore the highlights from Jesus' words to His disciples as they embarked on their mission.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 2.*

## The Kingdom of Heaven Is Near

**Read** Matthew 10:7. What does it mean that the “kingdom of heaven” is near? What is your understanding of the “kingdom of heaven”?

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A kingdom is the territory under the authority of a king. God’s kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, includes not only geographical territory but spiritual, as well. At one point Jesus even said, “The kingdom of God is within you” (*Luke 17:21*).

**What** does it mean that the “kingdom of God” is within us? How are we to understand this idea?

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Before Jesus and His disciples began their ministry, John the Baptist began preaching that the kingdom of heaven was near (*Matt. 3:2*). The New Testament clearly sees Jesus as Israel’s promised King, fulfilling all the hopes and predictions of the Old Testament (*see Luke 1:32, 33*). But the people were expecting a political king who would establish a political rule over specific geographical territory and free them from the Romans.

The kingdom that Jesus preached about was far different. It was not going to come when the Romans were overthrown. The kingdom of heaven was now. Now people could see Jesus, hear His words, and learn the principles on which salvation and heaven are based. Now they could learn to follow His example of how to live. Now they could see how the principles of God’s government operate in real life. Now they could choose to become part of that kingdom. Now they could have the promises of the Holy Spirit, of victory over sin, of hope for eternal life.

**In what ways are you now enjoying and benefiting from the privileges of living in the “kingdom of God”? What opportunities and promises are you not yet fully taking advantage of?**

## Missionary Instructions

In Matthew 10, Jesus commissions the Twelve to go out and do missionary work. Read over the chapter and then answer the following questions:

**What** does Jesus mean by telling the disciples to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves (*vs. 16*)? How can we apply these words to ourselves today?

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**Read** Matthew 10:2–4. What is the one thing that all of Jesus' disciples had in common? What does that tell us about the need always to keep cultural sensitivities before us as we seek to work in various cultures?

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**What** special powers did the disciples have? How can we, without those powers, still minister and witness to the world?

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**What** kind of reception did Jesus prepare His followers to receive? What lessons can we take from those words for ourselves?

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## Gentiles and Jews

**Read** Matthew 10:5, 6. How are we to understand these words in light of His later commission to witness to all the world?

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As He sent out His disciples, Jesus clearly told them to go only to the Israelites, not the Gentiles. Looking back from our perspective, we might deem this unfair. Why should the good news go only to the Jewish people? Why should everyone else be ignored, at least at that time?

The answer, it seems, stems from cultural sensitivities. Jesus did not want the disciples to jeopardize their mission. As Ellen G. White writes, “If they had first preached the gospel to these, they would have lost their influence among the Jews who were first to hear the message of God.”—*The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 19, 1892. She also suggests that it would have involved them in controversy with the Pharisees, and this would have discouraged the disciples in their work.—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, July 18, 1900.

In our mission today, there will always be certain cultural practices to which we must be sensitive. These practices may be misguided. They may be wrong. They might be exceedingly offensive to us. But we cannot ignore them and be effective witnesses.

**Read** John 10:10. What is Jesus saying here that can help us as we meet people with harmful cultures and traditions?

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As followers of Christ, we need to be very sensitive to the cultures that we are working in. The last thing we need is to portray a sense of arrogance and superiority. If we have something better, if we can point others to a more abundant life, let our message and lifestyle testify to it.

**If someone were to look at your Christian lifestyle, what would they see that would make it appealing? What kind of message does your lifestyle send to others?**

## A Holistic Ministry

**Read** Matthew 10:7, 8. Besides preaching the gospel, what else was involved in the disciples' mission?

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Jesus' commission to His disciples was not concerned with just the spiritual aspect of life. The disciples were to teach and preach, but they were also to care for people's physical needs. Sure, in the end, the ultimate goal for everyone is salvation and eternal life, but that does not mean we need to ignore the pain and suffering we find all around us.

When Jesus spoke in the synagogue in Nazareth, He read from the book of Isaiah and made the words His own (*see Luke 4:18, 19*). Not only is He going to help the poor, the blind, the oppressed, and the imprisoned; He also is going to proclaim “ ‘the year of the Lord's favor’ ” (*vs. 19, NIV*). Jesus here refers to the jubilee year (*Lev. 25:8–54*), where every 50 years the ownership of land returned to the original owners.

**Skim** Leviticus 25:8–54. What seems to be the main moral concern there? What principle is the Lord conveying to His people?

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As Ellen White says, “a safeguard was afforded against the extremes either of wealth or of poverty.”—*Education*, p. 43. In the jubilee year, all slaves were also to be freed, and all debts were to be canceled.

Jesus instructs His disciples to have a balanced ministry. Certainly, they were to prepare people for the kingdom of heaven. But they were also to remember that, in an important sense, the kingdom was already with them. And that meant they were to have concern for people's total needs—including physical and social. By ministering to folks' needs now, we can open them up to the reality and promise of eternal life.

**How do you treat those less fortunate than you? When is the last time you did something for someone purely out of selfless compassion and concern?**

## Do Not Be Afraid of Them

Much of Jesus' address to His disciples is devoted to advice on how to deal with problems they will encounter. The message they proclaim, although it is about love and right living, will encounter opposition in certain places. In fact, said Jesus, they should be prepared for persecution.

**Read Matthew 10:22 and Hebrews 10:35, 36. What is the crucial message to us in these texts?**

Jesus' reference to perseverance is in the context of persecution. The apostle Paul says, "We know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope" (*Rom. 5:3, 4, NIV*). Likewise, James writes, "The testing of your faith develops perseverance" (*James 1:3, NIV*).

**In what ways can difficult times test your faith? How can you strengthen your spiritual life so that you will persevere in your faith through these times?**

Jesus tells His disciples that they should not fear the difficult circumstances they will encounter. They will be brought before governors and kings to be His witnesses.

"'But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it,'" He says (*Matt. 10:19, NIV*). He promises that God will speak through them and give them the words to speak.

The book of Acts provides plenty of examples of what Jesus warned about. Peter and Paul and many others were taken constantly before the authorities to give an account of their actions. Each time they spoke boldly of their faith. Jesus reassures the disciples that God cares even for sparrows and that He has numbered " 'the very hairs of your head. . . . So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows' " (*Matt. 10:30, 31, NIV*).

**Read Matthew 10:38, 39. What is Jesus promising us? What is He not promising us? What comfort can you draw for yourself from these words?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “The First Evangelists,” pp. 349–358, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“Men’s hearts are no softer today than when Christ was upon the earth. They will do all in their power to aid the great adversary in making it as hard as possible for the servants of Christ, just as the people did with Christ when He was upon the earth. They will scourge with the tongue of slander and falsehood. They will criticize, and turn against the servant of God the very efforts he is leading them to make. They will, with their evil surmisings, see fraud and dishonesty where all is right and where perfect integrity exists. They lay selfish motives to the charge of God’s servants, when He Himself is leading them, and when they would give even their lives if God required, if by so doing they could advance His cause.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 234.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 In what ways does our mission field today differ from the one Jesus’ disciples went into? What are the similarities?
- 2 As a class, talk about what it means to be living in the “kingdom of heaven” now. What, if anything, do we have to show for it; that is, if someone were to look at us as a whole, what would they see that is different than what they would see in any other voluntary organization working together for a common cause?
- 3 How involved are you and your local church in evangelism, in witnessing? How are you working to relieve the suffering of those around you? How can your local church do better in that area? Why is that aspect of our work so crucial? Why, though, is ministering to the physical needs of those around us not enough? At the same time, what happens when we emphasize preaching and ignore the social dimension of the gospel?

**Summary:** The greatest Teacher the world has ever seen took time to give specific instructions to His disciples before He sent them out into their mission field. The principles He outlined to them are timeless, and we must not ignore them today.

# Homes of Hope: Part 1

by LESLEY DAVIDSON

Two years ago I met Robin, an outgoing, witty, and friendly woman. She had come to my church, she said, “for the company.” She was lonely and wanted an outlet. But she made it clear that she didn’t believe what Adventists teach. This might have intimidated me, except our church in Australia had begun a new program called “Homes of Hope.” And Robin fit right into this program. I decided to prayerfully make Robin my Homes of Hope project.

Homes of Hope is a program designed to help church members befriend visitors and those in the community who are searching for something better. Jesus befriended people before He taught them, and we were trying to follow His pattern when we inaugurated Homes of Hope. It seemed easy to just be friends and answer questions if they came up.

I invited Robin to tea to get acquainted. We talked for two hours. She shared her troubled past, her pain, and the issues she was dealing with. Several times she reminded me that she was not attending church because she believed but because she wanted company. That was fine with me. She was welcome to come. Because I did not have to try to “save” her, I was free to be Robin’s friend, to love her for Jesus, to encourage her to taste and see that God was for real.

Soon Robin and I were spending hours talking by phone and visiting. We shared so much, and I found in her a real friend.

Robin enjoyed church and wanted more to do, so I introduced her to Adventurers. She adored the children and often brought them treats or visited them during the week.

Then Robin began feeling tired. She decided to visit a health spa, hoping that the mineral baths would help her feel better. I went along, looking forward to four days alone with my friend, sharing my faith without interruption.

By the end of the second day she began asking questions, hard questions. She told me she believed in reincarnation. *How can I answer that one, God?* I prayed silently. And God gave me the words to say to her. Before I realized it, I was quoting scripture and explaining theology that I had never uttered before. To my amazement, she understood and accepted it.

(Continued next week)

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