

INVITATION TO GREATNESS

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on September 29, 1963 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

“And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness. But when he saw the multitudes he was moved with compassion for them, because they were distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest indeed is plenteous, but the laborers are few, Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he send forth laborers into his harvest.

“And he called unto him his twelve disciples, and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of disease and all manner of sickness.

“Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.” (Matt. 9:35-10:4). This passage of scripture is the beginning of the text that I want to lay before you in our study. In these verses and those which shall follow we find some rather wonderful things concerning the central emphasis of Christ’s ministry--the carrying of the gospel to the lost. There are a number of things mentioned here that will help us to comprehend the magnitude of the task and the means of carrying it out. I have drawn up a list of ten special conclusions from this reading that I would like to share with you.

Conclusion Number One

First of all, there is the very obvious fact of a great need for more workers in carrying the Lord’s message to the lost. Notice Christ’s emphasis, “The harvest indeed is plenteous, but the laborers are few.” Then he added, “Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he send forth laborers into his harvest.” There is an urgent need for more people who will give themselves in whatever way their talents and their training permit to the carrying of the gospel of Christ to the lost. In John 14:6 Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by me.” This means that when people have not heard of Christ, or when they know of him so casually that they have not come to believe in him as the divine Son of God, they do not have salvation. Christ is the door, the only door there is to eternal life in heaven. Until he is preached he is not known. In the Roman letter, chapter 10, verse 13f, Paul wrote, “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” The passage continues, “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be sent.” The opening emphasis of our text is that there is a need for more men and women to spend themselves in the carrying of the gospel to the lost.

Conclusion Number Two

The second of our conclusions is that the choosing and the training of these workers is vitally important. Luke tells us in chapter 6, verses 12 and 13, that Jesus spent the entire night in prayer before calling his disciples together and selecting the twelve apostles from among them. The very circumstances are significant. So vital was this choice that Jesus spent all night in prayer. Then he spent three years in training them. This was as long as the average person spends in getting his college education, yet their training was much more than college because they lived with Jesus twenty-four hours of the day. The second conclusion, then, is the importance of choosing workers and training workers.

I might say that just as there was a need in Christ’s day for the choosing and the training of workers so there is today. This is why I believe so strongly in the imperative of Christian education and why I ask you to support Christian education with your prayers, with your contributions and with your children. We so desperately need more elders, more deacons, more teachers, more song leaders, and more preachers who are well trained--those of the next generation need to be better equipped than those of us of this generation. There is a need for all of the spiritual training that we can give.

Conclusion Number Three

The third of our conclusions is that when Christ called these men to be his apostles he was calling them to greatness. They had been fishermen, tax collectors and the like, so when Jesus said, “Come, follow me,” they faced difficult decisions. It meant leaving family and occupation. But it was a call to greatness. I am convinced that when a man hears the call of Christ today, it is a call to greatness. The only greatness we ever permanently achieve is in hearing the call of Christ. They wrestled with these problems, because they loved their children and wives and were deeply involved in their occupations. They might have said, “Lord, we love you, we believe in what you are teaching, we will certainly say a word for you everywhere that we go, but Lord, we cannot pull up our roots and

follow you fulltime.” But had these apostles not done so, we would have never known their names. Three years after heeding Christ’s call Peter was the great apostle who preached on Pentecost with the greatest response to a sermon in the history of the world. These men were transformed.

#### Conclusion Number Four

We look again at our text, “These twelve Jesus sent forth, and charged them, saying, Go not into any way of the Gentiles, and enter not into any city of the Samaritans; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons: freely ye received, freely give.” (Matt. 10:5-8). This was the “limited commission”—they were to go just to the Jews. Later on the “great commission,” the universal commission, was given: “Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them ... and teaching them ...” (Matt. 28:19-20). In the limited commission, which was just for a little while, the apostles were the ones sent out, but now it is all of us who are sent everywhere to preach the gospel to all mankind.

Christianity is seen, I think, in its fullness when you look at the verbs. Jesus says, “Come,” and the moment that you come, accepting him and believing in him he says, “Go and teach.” There are other key verbs like believe, think, speak, live, do and be. The verbs of Christianity are prominent. The fourth conclusion is that when Jesus calls us he is calling us to get busy carrying his message.

#### Conclusion Number Five

Looking at the text, verses 9-11 of Matthew 10, we read, “Get you no gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses; no wallet for your journey, neither two coats, nor shoes, nor staff: for the laborer is worthy of his food. And into whatsoever city or village ye shall enter, search out who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go forth.” Conclusion number five is that the gospel must be preached by people whose mind is not on material things. Do not bother about an extra coat and do not worry about getting your wallet full of gold or silver or brass. Just go preach. The laborer is worthy of his food. The Lord will see that you are taken care of. The messenger of God must not be concerned about material things.

In this same vein, do you notice that he said, “Into whatsoever city or village ye shall enter, search out who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go forth?” Live among the people, live with the people, live on the level that the people live. Here is one of our biggest problems in carrying the gospel to foreign nations. In Africa, South America, the Middle East, and the Far East we Americans find it difficult to live on the level of the people, and as long as American missionaries drive big cars and in the eyes of the natives live above them, the gospel somehow does not get through. When Jesus sent out his disciples he told them to live with the people. They stayed in their homes, ate what the people ate, and slept on the same kind of beds the people slept on. It has been proved over and over that people, wherever they are in the world, do not like to be preached down to by those who have the soft life and the big income.

#### Conclusion Number Six

Again we read, “And as ye enter into the house, salute it. And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, as ye go forth out of that house or that city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city.” (Matt. 10:12-15). In this I see conclusion number six. There is a tremendous responsibility connected with this preaching of the gospel. I think of it first as the responsibility of those of us who preach but that is not what this passage says. This passage emphasizes the responsibility of the hearer. In those houses where they do not heed and do not listen, the disciples were to shake off the dust of their feet. For those who hear the gospel of Christ and turn deaf ears, Jesus said that it will be more tolerable in the day of judgment for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah than for them. When the gospel is preached there is a tremendous responsibility on the hearer that he not be uninterested.

#### Conclusion Number Seven

Again our text says, “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to councils, and in their synagogues they will scourge you; yea and before governors and kings shall ye be brought for my sake, for a testimony to them and to the Gentiles ... brother shall deliver up brother to death, and the father his child: and the children shall rise up against parents, and cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake but he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved ... be not afraid of them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” Then Christ says, talking to those who go out with his message, “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? and not one of them shall fall on the ground without your Father: but the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.” (Matt. 10:16-18, 21-22, 28-31).

There will be opposition when you carry the gospel: when you tell men that they are sinners, that they need to repent, that they are lost. Of course, there will be opposition. There will be criticism; there will be persecution. But it is wonderful to know that the Lord is

concerned and will care for us. Conclusion number seven, then, is that the messenger of God needs to expect and to be ready to accept persecution and yet persevere in proclaiming the gospel.

#### Conclusion Number Eight

Again, look at the text. “But when they deliver you up, be not anxious how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you.” (Matt. 10:19-20). Conclusion number eight is that the message will be supplied by God. In the first century the Holy Spirit guided the apostles in the hour of their speaking. Peter on Pentecost was guided in what he preached. But in our day the Holy Spirit does not speak to us miraculously in the hour of our speaking, but through the inspired word. In preaching there is no value unless it is the message of God and only the message of God that we preach. So, conclusion number eight is that God will supply the message, the only message that we have any right to preach.

#### Conclusion Number Nine

Again we read the text, “Think not that I came to send peace on the earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother in law: and a man’s foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that doth not take his cross and follow after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.” (Matt. 10:34-39). In this great enterprise of preaching the gospel conclusion number nine is that following the Lord takes everything we have got. It is all, or nothing at all. You cannot hold back first place in your life and still be a Christian. Even parents or loved ones must not be more important to us than our God.

#### Conclusion Number Ten

Finally, the text speaks once more, “He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward: and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you he shall in no wise lose his reward.” (Matt. 10:49-42). Conclusion number ten is that everybody who helps is just as important as everybody else. Those who give and pray are just as important as those who go and speak. Everybody who helps in this great work of preaching the gospel shall have his reward.

#### In Conclusion

Now what we have found this ninth and tenth chapter of Matthew is that the great work of God’s people is to carry his gospel to the lost. To those of you who are Christians I would say, “Be sure that in some way in your life you are helping in this work.” There are different talents, different backgrounds of training and different opportunities, but no Christian can be inactive and uninterested in carrying the gospel. It may be that some of you can only pray, fervently, for those who are hearing the gospel and for those who are carrying it to them. It may be that others can do their best in giving of their means. What a thrill it is to think of a businessman who can make it possible for many men to be in the field preaching the gospel because of his generosity. There are many others of us who need to go with the gospel. Telling of Christ gives purpose to our living. It gives life a challenge.

To the non-Christian we would say, “The Lord needs you in his work. You need him in order to be saved, but he needs you to work in his service.” As we close this lesson this is the emphasis that I most wanted to make. Some of you are not yet Christians. Opportunities are within your grasp and the Lord needs you. Do not sit on the sidelines and wait. Come and use yourself in the Lord’s service. Confess his name before men this very hour, turn from sin, be baptized, and then go out and live for him. It will give your life meaning that it has never had, and it will mean salvation for your soul. Our Lord’s invitation is too precious to reject.