

I Am Sending You Out

As Hurricane Sandy was growing and howling up the coast in late October of 2012, 450 New York National Guard soldiers were preparing to get on an earlier-than-planned flight to head to the Midwest. What was drawing them away? They were scheduled to participate in a mock earthquake exercise called Vigilant Guard. Yes, 450 soldiers were being sent to a “fake disaster” while a “real disaster” was on their doorstep.

Fortunately, after facing significant criticism, the New York National Guard reversed their decision and sent the soldiers to the frontlines of Hurricane Sandy where they performed heroically, doing things like rescuing 180 patients from a flooded nursing home and pulling trapped civilians from flooded homes.¹

How is the world-wide Church today spending its valuable resources and where is it deploying its ‘rescue workers’ in the world? Are we spending all our time “practicing” for potential disasters or are we deploying our troops to the frontlines where the storm is coming ashore? And how about you and me? What are we doing about the raging spiritual storm in our world? Those are uncomfortable questions, but we need to consider them today as we examine Jesus’ instruction to His disciples in this passage. First, we need to see it wasn’t just the disciples:

I. We, Too, are Sent

Let me give you a little background about this passage. There are multiple times when Jesus sent His disciples out to do ministry. In this passage, He sends out the Twelve. This is happening about halfway through His second year of ministry. Another time, He sent out seventy-two disciples. That happened earlier in His ministry because it says that He “...*sent them two by two... to every town and place where he was about to go.*” (Luke 10:1) And a third “sending” is one we’re most familiar with, which is found in Matt. 28, after His resurrection, where He is sending His disciples to “all the world.”

Now, in this passage in Matthew, Jesus specifically tells the disciples to go only to the Jews, not to the Gentiles. However, if you compare the instructions that Jesus gave to the Twelve and to the Seventy-Two, they are almost identical. And since we know that Jesus eventually went to a Samaritan village and He regularly ministered to Gentiles, I think we can safely say that these instructions are for us, as well as for the original Twelve.

So, what then are our instructions from Jesus? First, we need to recognize the obvious, which is that we are sent. All of Jesus’ sending instructions begin with some form of the phrase, “*Go! I’m sending you out.*” If we’re His followers, we’re being sent out to all places near and far.

Then, secondly, it’s also clear that Jesus sent certain people to specific locations or to certain groups of people. The Twelve were sent to the Jews. The Seventy-Two were sent to every town that He, Jesus, was going to visit. After the resurrection, all His followers were sent world-wide to locations and people groups near and far. Does this mean that we all have to leave home? No, some will stay locally, but whether we stay local or go global, we all are to be ‘on mission.’ We are all equipped to contribute to His world-wide mission. And what exactly is the world-wide mission of Jesus? To the Twelve, Jesus said:

“As you go, preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near.’” (Matt. 10:7)

After His resurrection, Jesus said to the Eleven and through them to us:

“...go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matt. 28:19, 20)

And how exactly are we supposed to accomplish the mission? Jesus tells us:

...do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. (Matt. 10:19, 20)

Do you see Jesus’ point here? These disciples have been His followers for a little over a year! Isn’t there a lot they don’t know yet? They haven’t even seen Him do all His miracles. They haven’t heard His definitive teaching about the Holy Spirit that He gave in the Upper Room. They haven’t seen Him walk on water or raise Lazarus from the dead. They aren’t fully equipped yet! How can this be good?

Jesus said, *“Don’t worry about what to say or how to say it.”* On what basis should they not worry? On the basis that the Spirit of Jesus will be with them! They aren’t alone! The Spirit is their “equipment.” The Spirit is their resource. The Spirit is their power.

We are “sent” people. We’re men and women on a mission. We possess the equipping, the resources, the power of the Spirit of God. What’s holding us back? Fear? Friends, we aren’t going alone or empty handed. The Spirit is going with us and He is all we need.

Which leads to the second truth in Jesus’ sending instructions, which is that...

II. We Are Certified.

After the resurrection, Jesus said first that:

... “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” (Matt. 28:18)

Do you believe that or not? “All authority in heaven and on earth” is pretty much all inclusive, right? If we believe that, then whatever Jesus says about us is the last word, isn’t it? And in Luke 10, Jesus said to the seventy-two:

I have given you authority... to overcome all the power of the enemy... (Luke 10:19)

To be certified means to “be guaranteed, to be endorsed by a reliable source.” We are officially sanctioned to represent Jesus. Just like a product in the supermarket carries a label that “certifies” its authenticity or its reliability for freshness, we carry the Spirit of God as our certification that we are authorized representatives of Jesus.

In the Matt. 10 passage, from verse 26 to 31, Jesus says three times:

...do not be afraid... (Matt. 10: 26, 28, 31)

If someone tells you three times, “Don’t be afraid,” what does that usually mean? It usually means there must be something to be afraid of! And yes, Jesus is perfectly honest with us that, when we go on mission for Him, there will be obstacles and dangers because there is an enemy. But He has given us authority to overcome ALL THE POWER of the enemy. Do you understand that? Even brand-new followers of Jesus have authority over the enemy. So, do we have any reason to fear? No, we really don’t.

Now, you might be thinking, “But how? Give me an example. How am I qualified? What exactly are my tools?” Max Lucado, in his book *Outlive Your Life*, writes this:

Long before the church had pulpits and baptisteries, she had kitchens and dinner tables. Even a casual reading of the New Testament unveils the house as the primary tool of the church. The primary gathering place of the church was the home. Consider the genius of God’s plan. The first generation of Christians was a tinderbox of contrasting cultures and

backgrounds. At least fifteen different nationalities heard Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost. Jews stood next to Gentiles. Men worshiped with women. Slaves and masters alike sought after Christ. Can people of such varied backgrounds and cultures get along with each other?

We wonder the same thing today. Can Hispanics live in peace with Anglos? Can Democrats find common ground with Republicans? Can a Christian family carry on a civil friendship with a Muslim couple down the street? Can divergent people get along? The early church did...

Do you have a front door? A table? A chair? Bread and meat for sandwiches?

Congratulations! You just qualified to serve in the most ancient of ministries: hospitality. Hospitality opens the door to uncommon community. It's no accident that hospitality and hospital come from the same Latin word, for they both lead to the same result: healing. When you open your door to someone, you are sending this message: "You matter to me and to God." You may think you are saying, "Come over for a visit." But what your guest hears is, "I'm worth the effort."²

Do you see it? Jesus is sending us to every nation, every culture and sub-culture and micro-culture on earth. But whether you are one who gets on a plane and goes or whether you stay here, we're all called to participate in the same mission: the mission of stepping across a cultural boundary with the love of Jesus Christ. And what tools has He equipped us with? A table, a chair, a sandwich, a pot of rice, a piece of chicken or a cup of tea and a heart full of Jesus.

So, do you love Jesus? Is His Spirit alive within you? Then you are qualified and equipped to speak, to serve, to heal in His name. And as we do those very simple things, the demons will run like cockroaches from the light! You're certified to go, so go, in His name!

Finally, we see in this passage that...

III. One Day, We'll Be Rewarded for Going

We obviously haven't covered all of Jesus' instructions here, but He concludes by describing a reward. He says:

"He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward." (Matt. 10: 40-42)

Do you hear what Jesus is saying? He's assuming that we will go, that we will cross a cultural barrier with Him. He assumes that. Eugene Peterson rightly interprets verse 40 this way: We are intimately linked in this harvest work. Anyone who accepts what you do, accepts me, the One who sent you. (Matt. 10:40 The Message)

This is your first reward, you are intimately linked with Jesus IF YOU GO. In the verses just before this, Jesus is giving examples of this. He says that if you want this tighter connection with Him, you're going to have to be willing to have a loose connection with your biological family who doesn't want you to go. Verse 37, "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me..."

Jesus says that if you want to have a tight connection with Him, you have to have a loose connection with some of your friends too, who want you to stay. Verse 32, “Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven.”

Jesus says that if you want to have a tight connection with Him, you have to have a loose connection with your life dreams that prevent you from going with Jesus. Verse 39 in The Message, puts it this way: “If your first concern is to look after yourself, you’ll never find yourself. But if you forget about yourself and look to me, you’ll find both yourself and me.”

So, it all comes back to whether or not you will do what Jesus commands all His followers to do, which is what? “Go, I’m sending you out.” And what does He mean by “Go”? Jesus means three things. He means give, pray or physically move in that order. The lowest form of going is to give. In the Greek, Matt. 10:42 literally says:

“And whoever gives to drink, one of these little ones, ONLY a cup of cold water... truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.”

Giving a gift to meet a physical need is the first level of ‘going.’ It fulfills the requirement of Jesus’ command. If you don’t do this, you aren’t in obedience to Jesus’ command, but it isn’t the highest level of going. People sometimes think that someone who gives a huge gift of money is fulfilling the ultimate form of going with Jesus. It is obedience and it will be rewarded but it’s what is expected of every disciple. It gets you started and it should lead to the second level of going which is...

Praying. Why is praying a more significant way to ‘go’ than giving money? Because praying accomplishes a spiritual end, while money or food accomplishes only a physical end. Saving a person’s life physically is a very good thing. Jesus says it’s a fabulous way of demonstrating love. But if that’s all you do, the end result is temporary. But if you pray for a person’s soul, you are giving an eternal gift that can produce an eternal result. When we ask our World Outreach Team partners for a list of their needs, their number-one request is always prayer. Do they also have physical needs? Of course, but they never want just physical gifts without prayer. Why? Because they are passionate about making an eternal impact with the people they are serving and it’s only through prayer that hearts will be changed. Prayer is the second way and the second level of how you can fulfill Jesus’ mandate to ‘GO.’

And the third way, the highest level of going is to move physically. Whether you physically move to the point of need for a day or a week or a month or a lifetime, physically moving yourself to the point of need is the highest level of fulfillment of Jesus’s command to go. You may be thinking, “Well sure, but isn’t that an old way of thinking? I mean we have the Internet now. We can preach, we can converse, we can pray with people over the Internet. Why does anyone have to ‘physically move-in’ with people anymore?”

There’s one thing you can’t do over the Internet. You can’t suffer with someone. You can’t experience life under all the local pressures that they are experiencing. You can’t live and die with them.

A true story is told of an effort to reach an isolated tribe in Africa many decades ago. As sincere as the missionaries were and as helpful as they were to the tribe, they had very little spiritual response from the people until the whole first generation of missionaries died. And they did not go home to die, they died and were buried with these people in Africa. Then, there was a sweeping revival. When the tribal people were asked, “Why is it that now you respond so openly to the gospel?” They replied, “Because in watching how our friends suffered and died, we understood what they were saying about Jesus.”

Jesus commands us to ‘Go.’ How are you obeying that command? It begins with giving. We practice something called ‘Faith Promise’ giving? What is that? A Faith Promise is taking a step of faith. You say to God, “I am going to trust you, Father, to supply the amount of money that I am writing down on this card. I don’t know how you will do it, but I trust that you will. And when you do, I will give it all to Valley’s World Outreach budget.” It’s not what you can afford. It’s what you have faith that God will supply. I could tell you dozens of stories from people of this church who made a faith promise and then saw it fulfilled quite miraculously through an unexpected bonus at work or through someone paying a years-old bill that was the exact amount they had written down on their Faith Promise. This isn’t about your money! It’s about your faith!

Secondly, for whom will you pray? The last station of our World Outreach Tour is a place where you can find a prayer card for every one of our World Outreach Team families. You can sign up for one or more at that station today. And when you do, you participate in solving the deepest problem of mankind, which is not hunger or disease or poverty, but spiritual death. Through your prayer, spiritually dead people will find life.

Lastly, is this the year that you ‘physically move’ by going on a short-term mission trip? Or is this the year that you expand the time you ‘physically move’? Or is this the year you attend the luncheon “Is Missions in My Future?” (12:30pm Avon campus) Liz and I will be spending a month this summer helping our son Adam, who will be back in Zimbabwe with his three kids, for three months. God is sending all of us out! How and where will you go?

Give, pray, physically move – the first step is to give. Everyone has enough faith to promise something. Right now, please take one of the Faith Promise cards in the pew in front of you. We’re going to give you a moment right now to take this first step of ‘going’ that Jesus gives to all His sheep. Even the smallest step will be rewarded by your having a tighter connection with Jesus. Let’s take that step now, whether you’re in the Sanctuary, the Venue or in Greene-Hills School in Bristol. We are all followers of Christ. He wants to reward us all.

[“After a few minutes, your site pastor will give you further instructions.”]

¹ PreachingToday, News that Illustrates: Nov. 12, 2012

² Max Lucado, *Outlive Your Life* (Nashville: Nelson Publishers, 2010), p. 55