

Commentary on Matthew 10:1-15

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JESUS' CHARGE TO THE MISSIONARIES. 10:1-42.

I. THE APPOINTMENT OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES. 10:1-4.

A. The Selection.

This is Mt's first reference to Jesus' "**twelve** disciples" (though there are earlier references to "disciples"). Jesus chooses them from a larger number (cf. Lk 6:13). That the four fishermen and Matthew came to be numbered among the Twelve, helps to explain Mt's record of their calls (4:18-22; 9:9). In choosing 12 apostles, corresponding to the 12 tribes of Israel, Jesus signals that he has come to reconstitute Israel around his person (cf. 16:18). NB that he chooses 12 and **not 11**. While he will remain **with** believers (28:20), he is not one of their number; he is not a fellow-believer but the **Lord** of the church (23:8-10).

B. The Groupings.

The 12 are listed as six pairs (note the **kais** in the Greek text), corresponding to Jesus' sending them out "two by two" (Mk 6:7). When the 12 are divided into three groups of four each, the same name appears first in each group in all three Gospels. That Peter, James and John came to comprise "the inner three" (cf. e.g.- 17:1), explains their being in the first group (Andrew is added as Peter's brother). The Synoptists' pairing makes it most unlikely that "Levi son of Alphaeus" (Matthew's name in Mk 2:14) is the brother of "James son of Alphaeus" (Mt 10:3 & pars.); for whereas Simon and Andrew are paired, as are the sons of Zebedee, Matthew is linked with Thomas. (Nor are Levi and James so connected anywhere else in the NT.) The grouping of Philip and Bartholomew in the Synoptics, and of Philip and Nathanael in Jn, supports the suggestion that Bartholomew ("bar Talmai") is Nathanael.

C. Certain Names.

1. Simon. His being the "first" and his being surnamed "Peter," are explained in 16:13-20.

2. Matthew. Only in the list of Mt 10 is he called "the tax collector." This is not to distinguish him from other Matthews (there is no other "Matthew" in the NT; "Matthias" in Acts 1 is spelled differently), but rather - as Matthew's self-designation - highlights the kind of life out of which Jesus called him (9:9-13).

3. Simon the Zealot. The Greek **kananaios** (behind "zealot") is a transliteration rooted in the Hebrew/Aramaic verb **qana**, "to be jealous, zealous" (cf. Lk 6:15, **zēlōtēs**). This identifies Simon either as one zealous for the Law or, much more likely, as a member of the Zealot party (Gundry, 183). In the latter case, his association with "Matthew the tax collector" witnesses to the remarkable breadth of Jesus' choice.

4. Judas Iscariot. "Iscariot" is probably a place name (Kerioth). His name is placed last in each list - for the reason given by all Synoptists.

D. The Commission.

Here alone does Matthew speak of twelve **apostles** (vv. 1-2). Quite appropriately so, for Jesus here authorizes the disciples (v. 1) to go forth (v. 5, **apostellō**) as extensions of his own ministry.

II. THE IMMEDIATE MISSION. 10:5-15.

A. Introduction.

Verses 5-15 relate to missionary activity that immediately awaits the apostles; but 10:16-42 embrace their and other Christians' missionary activity beyond the present period.

1. The Synoptic parallels. Mt 10:5-15 parallels Mk 6:8-11 and Lk 9:2-5. Both Mk 6:12 and Lk 9:6 record the apostles' departure. Also, Mt 10:16-42 has parallels recorded elsewhere in Mk and Lk, including Lk 12 and the eschatological discourses of Mk 13 and Lk 21.

2. Matthew's method. Matthew presents the material of Jesus' ministry very systematically in the service of catechesis (cf. **INTRODUCTION**). Corresponding to his method in chs. 5-7 and 8-9, Matthew here joins together various strands of Jesus' teaching related to the apostles' and the church's **mission**. This does not in principle exclude the possibility that Jesus, already at this stage, looked beyond the immediate future to the larger mission of which the present outreach was the first stage.

B. The Mission Field: Jewry.

The disciples are instructed to avoid Gentiles and Samaritans (10:5). (Here is further evidence of the distinction between 10:5-15 and 10:16-42. V. 18 reflects a situation in which Gentiles too are evangelized.) Instead, they are to go to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (v. 6). As the parallel with Gentiles and Samaritans shows, this phrase means not certain Jews within Israel, but **Israel as a whole**: the lost sheep are the house of Israel (cf. remarks on 9:12-13). For now, Jesus' and his apostles focus on Jews (the story of 8:5-13 is the exception that proves the rule). The whole of Mt makes it plain that the evangelizing of Jews paves the way for an outreach to Gentiles (28:19).

C. The Message.

Jesus authorizes the Twelve to extend his own ministry (10:40, "He who receives you receives me"). So they are to preach the nearness of the Kingdom and to accomplish miracles (10:7-8, cf. v. 1). The summary of 11:4-5 embraces the apostles' activity as well as Jesus' (which helps to explain Matthew's placing the mission-charge here, before ch. 11). V. 8b, "Freely you have received, freely give," speaks of the **grace** of the Kingdom (offered both in Jesus' preaching and in his healing ministry), already experienced by the apostles and now to be imparted through them to other Jews. In view of the second clause of v. 8b, I reject Gundry's idea (185) that the first clause of v. 8b refers to Jesus' granting authority to the apostles.

D. The Journey.

The instructions of v. 9 have the practical value of leaving the apostles unencumbered by excessive weight as they travel. The close of v. 9 ("the worker is worth his keep") appears to have v. 8 ("freely give") in view: behind "keep" is the Greek **trophēs**, "food," "in order to distinguish acceptance of free board in hospitable homes from the prohibited acquisition of money and goods, which **misthou** might seem to include" (Gundry, 187); cf. the usage of **misthos** in 20:8; 1 Cor 9:14-18. But the principal reason for the instructions of v. 9 (as its closing words indicate), is that the apostles might depend on others' hospitality.

E. The Reception: the Worthy and the Unworthy. 10:11-15.

1. The worthy. "Worthiness" relates not to a person's existing state or achievement, but to the kind of reception he grants to the bearers of Jesus' message. Whether a home is "deserving" (v. 13), depends on whether the apostles are welcomed and their message heeded (v. 14, from which negative formulation

we infer the positive criterion of "worthiness"). The effect of a positive reception of the apostles' message and work, is that they, the authorized representatives of Jesus, may "let their peace" rest on the house (v. 13). This interpretation is confirmed by the judgment on those who reject the message.

2. The unworthy. The "unworthy" are those who reject the apostles and their work: "if anyone will not welcome you or listen to your **words**" (v. 14a, showing the supremacy of preaching over miracles). Shaking the dust off one's feet (v. 14b) signals "a separation that results in deliverance to divine judgment" (Gundry, 190). V. 15, anticipating Jesus' woes on the cities in 11:20-24 (the Greek of 10:15 is very close to that of 11:22, 24), underscores the warning of judgment, and shows that it is especially perilous to reject this, God's ultimate expression of grace (see below on 10:42; 11:20-24; 25:31-46).