

Most of us who would call ourselves followers of Jesus long for the day when we get a better hearing. Whether that's in the media. In the community. Or even personally.

We long for the time when everyone will speak well of Jesus and the message of the gospel is wholeheartedly endorsed.

We pick up this sermon series from last year and land in Matthew 10.

Chapters 1-4 provided us with Jesus' lineage and commencement of his own ministry. To call all to:

'Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near.'

To change your mind. About Jesus. The ruler of the Kingdom come near.

Chapters 5 through 7, the Sermon on the Mount, outlined what living for that Kingdom looked like. Matthew 8 & 9 display Jesus' authority as ruler of that Kingdom.

In chapter 10 we read how he will select 12 apostles, messengers, to share in the mission he has begun. In v 7 we note their message is his message:

The Kingdom of Heaven has come near

If the Kingdom of Heaven has come near with Jesus' arrival, did the twelve believe it would be universally accepted?

When Jesus called them together in v 1 and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits. To heal every disease and sickness were they thinking 'This is going to be some ride! Geared for success! Revival is here.'

What should they expect when the news of the Kingdom is proclaimed? What should we expect when the news of the Kingdom is proclaimed?

In these opening verses of Matthew 10 Jesus will answer that question. Let's see what the passage has to tell us under three headings:

Kingdom Welcome. Kingdom Wisdom. Kingdom Worth. They're all words Jesus used in this passage to help the apostles understand their mission. And in turn to help us understand ours.

Kingdom Welcome (v 1-15)

Manage your expectations. When was the last time someone said that to you? Or you said it to someone else? Or you said it to yourself?

We've become experts at it over the last 12 months. Managing expectations. About work. About church. About travel. About socialising. About vaccines.

Jesus calls the twelve together. Matthew names them for us. Which probably tells us these instructions are particular. He doesn't give the authority in v 1 and v 8 to everybody.

And this authority to heal and cast out demons is not for their own promotion. It is Jesus declaring 'They're with me!'

The Kingdom of Heaven is near. The apostles bring, v 12: a Kingdom greeting. V 13: a Kingdom peace. V 14: a Kingdom welcome.

All gifts from the King of the Kingdom given in his name. So Jesus says to the apostles, as he would no doubt say to us:

Freely you have received; freely give.

And while this mission is pre-resurrection it none the less prepares for the resurrection. The healing, the casting out of demons, the curing of disease. All signs of the comprehensive and holistic healing to come at the cross of Christ.

There are only two outcomes when the good news of the Kingdom is shared. Receiving. Or refusing. There's no middle ground. No refraining or abstaining.

This will be the experience of the 12 as they share their Kingdom message. When received it will bring peace to persons, homes and towns. A Kingdom blessing.

For receiving their message was nothing less than receiving Jesus. He says later in this same chapter:

Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.

Many years ago a friend of mine, for several months, decided to fill out my name and details in as many advertisements applications in the papers as he

could find. When it said send us your details he would enter mine and post to the Reply Paid address.

For months our letter box was inundated with Property Prospectuses, applications to join the Armed forces, shares in a holiday homes, samples from cosmetic companies. Our letter box did actually collapse from the volume of mail.

Not content with this outcome, my friend, if you could call him that, then began providing details to sales people and religious groups to call and visit.

The phone went nuts. On Saturday mornings mainly, the door bell would ring. A salesman. Responding to my call about purchasing a vacuum cleaner.

The pinnacle of this prolonged prank was the morning my friend organised for the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons to turn up on my doorstep. At the same time.

I should have been welcoming. I had developed a medical condition known as doorbell syndrome.

If you've ever opened your door to discover visitors that you neither wish to welcome, nor listen to, then you have a reminder of how most people respond to what we call, the good news about Jesus.

The peace he offers is eternal. Restoring. Renewing. Returning life to that which God intends for everyone. Reconciled to him. Reconciled to one another.

And most importantly, v 15, rescues us from the judgment to come on the last Day. For our rejection of Jesus.

But it is not readily accepted. Willingly received. Next time you take the junk mail from the letter box and send it straight to the recycling bin, remember that is how most people think of the gospel. They don't want it in their home.

Jesus even gives permission to the apostles after rejection, to leave that home or town, taking their peace with them. Shaking the dust off their feet.

But it would be a mistake to read it as retreat.

Kingdom Wisdom (vv 16-23)

For secondly, a Kingdom welcome requires Kingdom wisdom.

V 16 is the modus operandi for the apostles. One verse with three pictures:

I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.

Matthew 9:36:

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Jesus' strategy is to send sheep among wolves in order to reach the sheep without a shepherd. As a priority they are to reach the lost from among God's own people. The mission to the ends of the world would come later.

Shrewd as snakes. To be shrewd is to have wisdom. Wisdom from God.

Innocent as doves. To be innocent is to have integrity. Integrity before God.

And the apostles are going to need both in spades.

As we probably have experienced, the first mistake we make about sharing the good news about Jesus is to do so in our own strength.

We think unless we can get the words exactly right it's not worth saying anything. Because we believe that person's eternal future rests with us.

The apostles could never do this in their own strength. Note the wisdom provided in v 19:

But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say,²⁰ for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

It's not an excuse for not knowing the gospel. It's a reminder that's it power for salvation does not come from within.

And he call for innocence appears in v 22:

You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

Expect opposition and accusation to come your way. If, v 25, they accuse me of being from the house of Beelzebul, the devil, expect them to accuse you likewise. No student is above the teacher. Or slave above their master.

When it comes to sharing the good news the apostles are to grasp two gifts of gospel wisdom that are immovable.

The first, the message does not change. Repent. The Kingdom of Heaven is near. Turn to Jesus. He's your only hope. Come to him on his terms.

Sadly, much of the church has lost sight of this. In order to make the message more palatable. More acceptable. More receivable. It's become more pliable.

Which doesn't require much wisdom. And mostly lacks integrity. Ironically the outcome hasn't been more acceptance. But acquiescence. Of the church to the world.

The second thing that does not change is the outcome. V 22. Those who stand firm will be saved. Vindicated.

V 23. The apostles won't even complete their mission before the Son of Man comes.

That date is a matter of debate. Could be Jesus' resurrection? Could be the destruction of the Temple in AD 70? Could be the return of Jesus?

The point is that the mission of the apostles will never be in vain. Standing firm for Jesus never is.

Kingdom Worth (v 24-31)

For it leads to the third and final assurance he shares with the apostles: their Kingdom worth.

Twice in this chapter Jesus gives permission for the twelve to leave the home or town, due to rejection, v 14, or persecution, v 23.

This is why they are called to travel light earlier in the chapter. Sustained by those who receive their message and ministry. A worker worth their keep.

But it is their worth before their Father in Heaven that is to be their ultimate strength.

V 29. Their life is in his hands. Not a sparrow falls to the ground outside his plan. And consider how much more you are worth to him.

Their days of Kingdom witness will be no more or less than God has ordained. We witness that fulfilment in the book of Acts.

V 30. Not a hair on your head is unnumbered. Nothing surprises God. Your circumstances are never outside his care. Beyond his reach.

Three times Jesus applies these truths to the twelve with the same four words. V 26. V 28. V 31. Do not be afraid.

We underestimate the gift of the gospel of Jesus Christ to deal with our fears. The 12 no doubt had many. If you are going to fear anyone, says Jesus, fear the One who can cast both body and soul into hell.

Humanly speaking, it's not a particularly attractive mission? And while this pre-resurrection commission is primarily a task of the 12, the later, greater commission at the end of the Gospel has us all swept up into the task of sharing the news of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Do you find yourself longing for the day when we get a better hearing? In the media? In the community? When everyone will speak well of Jesus. And the message of the gospel is wholeheartedly endorsed.

That is not the promise of the gospel. Most religious attempts to get acceptance from the world are at the expense of allegiance to Jesus.

But a Kingdom welcome. Shared with Kingdom wisdom. Because you know your Kingdom worth. That will count for eternity.

Jesus gives earthly warrant to our heavenly worth and reminds us:

Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven.