

Today is Super Bowl Sunday, and even though you can't really put that up there with Christmas and Easter, it **is** something of a national holiday. So I'm wearing my Western Kentucky University pullover today in honor of my daughter who's married to the head football coach there, and my son who also coaches there. Does anyone know their mascot? Go Hilltoppers!

And of course one of the great traditions in sports is the coach's pregame speech. I'd love to be in the locker room to hear Bill Belichick inspire his team today. But do you know what's considered the greatest pregame speech ever? It's the speech Herb Brooks gave to the U.S. men's national hockey team before their gold medal game against the USSR in the 1980 Olympics. His speech inspired a U.S. victory so improbable it's called the "Miracle on Ice." Even though it's hockey and not football, I thought maybe we'd watch just to get in the mood, not just for the Super Bowl but for the Winter Olympics (*video shown*).

That's a great pregame speech, but what if I told you Jesus gave an even better pregame speech? In fact, in Matthew 10 that's pretty much what we have—a speech given by Jesus before he sent his disciples out on the field. It wasn't the Super Bowl but it was their first mission. Up until now, they've been on the sidelines watching Jesus do his thing. But here he hands them the ball and sends them onto the playing field.

Today we're going to look at that speech and what it teaches us about not just their mission but our mission. Do you know as a follower of Christ you're part of a mission? As a church our mission is to make and mature more followers of Christ. But there are some important things we need to know about this mission to be successful. So turn with me to Matthew 9:35.

### **The "Why" of Christian Mission is Compassion**

**Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. (verses 35-36)**

The first thing we see is the "Why" of our mission. What motivates us? The answer is clear: compassion. Jesus saw the crowds and had compassion on them. The greek word is *slanchnizomai*, which literally means to feel something in your gut. We usually speak of feeling with our heart, like "I love her with all my heart,"

but we also say, "I hate him with all my guts," and that's the idea here, except in the opposite sense. Jesus cares so deeply for them he feels it in his guts. And the reason is they're "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." Without a shepherd, sheep are vulnerable, often wounded, lost and immobilized.

Do you ever just sit and people-watch? I love to people-watch; to observe the look on people's faces and wonder where they're going, what they're thinking, what they're going through. What if God people-watched? Do you ever wonder what he'd see? Well, here the Son of God is people-watching and what does he see? He doesn't look out on the crowd and think, "What a bunch of rotten sinners! You all disgust me." No! He feels compassion for them. They're defenseless; vulnerable. Their leaders (shepherds) have failed to lead them well. He cares about their welfare. That's why Jesus went around teaching, preaching the good news, and healing.

That's what motivated him and that's what motivates us. That's what motivated Mother Teresa to give her life to the sick and dying of Calcutta. That's what motivated William Carey and Amy Carmichael to give their lives reaching the lost. That's why when there's an earthquake, hurricane or famine you know World Vision, Samaritan's Purse and the Salvation Army will be there. That's what motivates many from our South Campus to share God's love with people living on the streets in RWC. That's what motivates a group from CPC to take food and hygiene supplies to the needy living up in the Tenderloin of SF. What motivates all that? It's compassion that starts in the heart of God and extends through his people.

### **The "How" of Christian Mission is Prayer and People**

That leads to the second thing we see here. It's the "How" of mission. If compassion is the motive, what's the means? How does this mission get done?

**Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." (verses 37-38)**

Jesus switches metaphors on us. He goes from shepherd-less sheep to unharvested fields. He tells us how to accomplish this mission: prayer and people. We need the Lord of the Harvest—Jesus—to send out people through our prayers. There's a shortage of workers, and the remedy for that isn't to lay guilt

trips on people, but to pray. To ask the One in charge, the Master of the fields, to employ more workers.

If you were to study the history of how God moves to reach the lost, you'd see the critical place prayer plays. In 1949, George and Elizabeth Wood, a missionary couple serving in China, were forced to leave the area. A local leader named Pastor Mung took over their church of 200 people. The Woods returned to America and by 1985 both of them died not knowing what happened to the church.

In 1988 their son George returned to China and met with Pastor Mung, who was in his 80's. For 28 years the Communists had done their best to extinguish the church. Pastor Mung wasn't allowed to preach and spent nine years in prison for his faith. When they finally allowed him to reopen the church in 1983 there were only 30 elderly people in attendance.

Assuming the church was on its last leg, George asked Pastor Mung, "How many believers do you have today?" Pastor Mung's wife brought a cardboard roll held together by yarn. The first page had 20 names. George turned over page after page with names of the baptized. Finally he asked them, "How many believers do you have now?" He said, "1,500 baptized believers." In disbelief George asked, "How did this happen?" Pastor Mung smiled as he shared his secret for church growth. It wasn't a program. He simply said, "Oh! Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. And we pray a lot!" Then he went on to describe what the Lord had done. Pastor Mung died in 2006 at the age of 96. But when he passed, that list had grown to over 15,000!

Do **we** pray a lot? Maybe if we prayed more, more would happen. I'm thankful for the handful of people in this church who gather every Sunday at 8:00 am to pray for our mission partners around the world. When was the last time you prayed a lot for the Lord of the harvest to send out workers?

### **The "Who" of Christian Mission is Ordinary People**

Speaking of workers, we might also ask something about the "Who" of Christian mission. It's interesting what happens next. Jesus just told his disciples to pray for workers to go into the harvest fields, and then what does he do? He sends into those fields the very people he told to pray! So **they** are the answer to their own prayer! When you start praying about something, watch out, God might call **you** to be the answer!

**Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.**

**These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. (Matt. 10:1-4)**

Here we see there were twelve men Jesus chose to be his apostles (sent ones). The number twelve was a deliberate reference to the twelve tribes of Israel because Jesus saw this group as representing the true people of God, like a new Israel. He sent them out to preach the same message of good news about the kingdom he'd preached, and he gave them authority over impure spirits, sickness and disease. This authority was unique to this group. It's not that healing never takes place today, but it's not normative as it was for the apostles. Read the book of Acts and you'll see almost all the healing was done through the apostles. That's why we call it "the Acts of the Apostles." In fact, in 2 Cor. 12:12 Paul defended his own apostleship by saying, "*I persevered in demonstrating among you the marks of a true apostle, including signs, wonders and miracles.*"

Having said that, there's a very real sense in which we're all called to this mission. At the very end of this gospel, the risen Christ said to his disciples, "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore 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. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*" We're not at the end of the age yet, so this commission still applies to us today.

But what I really want you to see is who the people are he calls into mission: Twelve names. Several of the names include some additional information. It's like they each have a name tag, but then under their name, something written underneath. A few of those additions are there to distinguish between one James and another James, one Simon and another Simon. Notice only one gets his occupation added. It's not Andrew the fisherman, but Matthew the tax collector; not exactly something you'd want to be remembered for! But that's the kind of people Jesus calls. And then, lastly, you have none other than Judas Iscariot, "who betrayed him."

What kind of people does he call and send on mission? The outstanding thing about the people on this list is how ordinary and flawed they were. It's not Peter the Great, or Thaddeus the Holiest of Hermits, or John the Doctor of Theology. It's common and messed up people like you and me. He sends ordinary, flawed people to take the extraordinary, flawless gospel to the world.

I remember years ago driving along Highway 17 with my dad, coming home from Santa Cruz. I was 15, dying to learn how to drive. And I was upset my dad never gave me the chance to learn. So right there on the notoriously windy and dangerous Highway 17, before heading down the hill, he stopped the car and said, "Okay, you drive." I wanted to say, "Just kidding!" but I could tell he was serious. So I took the wheel, and the first time I ever drove I steered our lumbering station wagon down Highway 17, going no more than about 15 mph in the slow lane!

I think that's how these twelve disciples felt as Jesus hands the wheel over to them, and that's how we sometimes feel: "I'm not ready for this. This is too hard. Maybe another time." But that's why we have to remember what Jesus says, "I am with you always..." Fortunately, my dad sat there beside me as I white-knuckled it down the hill, and Jesus not only sits beside us, but he lives within us.

One more thing about this that's comforting: Notice the Twelve are listed in pairs. Why is that? Yes, a few of them were brothers, but not all of them. It's because when Jesus sent them out he sent them two by two. Mark writes of this same occasion, "*Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits*" (Mark 6:7). Jesus doesn't send us out alone; he sends us out in community. And even though we're very different from one another, just as these Twelve were very different, he knows we're better together. In fact, it's our differences that make us better together.

### **The "What" of Christian Mission is to be Fully Devoted and Fully Dependent on Him**

This leads us finally to the "What" of Christian mission. And finally, we get to the speech. It's a speech that extends all the way from verse 5 to the end of the chapter. We're going to only look at the first half of it. As we read it, we'll see much of what Jesus says was specifically meant for the Twelve, but, still, there are some great things we can learn about our mission.

**These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.**

**"Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts—no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep. Whatever town or village you enter, search there for some worthy person and stay at their house until you leave. As you enter the home, give it your greeting. If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet. Truly I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. (verses 5-15)**

It's hard not to see some of this was specifically tailored for the Twelve as they went out for the first time. Notice they were only to go "to the lost sheep of Israel." They weren't to go into areas surrounding Galilee where Gentiles and Samaritans lived. This is in keeping with what Jesus said on another occasion, "*Salvation is from the Jews*" (John 4:22), and so it makes sense he'd begin

with them. Later, Paul said the gospel brings salvation to everyone who believes, "*first to the Jew, then to the Gentile*" (Rom 1:16). Today it's different. In fact, as we saw, later Jesus sends them out not just to the Jews but to "all the nations."

These instructions were also unique to the Apostles in their severity. They weren't allowed to take any provisions: no money, no bag, no extra clothes, sandals or staff. If they were living in the day of air travel, they wouldn't even have a carry-on bag—that's severe! But Jesus later changed these instructions. At the Last Supper he asked, "*When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?*" "*Nothing,*" they answered. He said to them, "*But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one*" (Lk 22:35-36). Jesus was saying the conditions after the crucifixion would be different, and so the game plan would be different.

It reminds me of the first time Lynn and I went to Europe. We'd just gotten married, just graduated from college, and had a few months before I started an internship. We wanted to be missionaries and thought it would be good to see other countries. We left for 10 weeks and all we brought were two backpacks. We didn't have a single hotel reservation; no credit cards. We did have a few relatives there and also knew of a few missionaries. We didn't make any plans; we just thought we'd show up. And do you know what? The Lord showed up. He took care of us. That was appropriate for that trip. We needed to experience God providing for us like that. But, believe me, the next time we went to Europe ten years later, we did it differently!

There still are some things we can learn from this that apply today. Let me just mention a few. First, just as we've received the gospel freely, so we should freely give it away. When God sends you out, you're dependent on him to provide. Don't charge for your services. You received grace free of charge; offer the same. "But how will I eat? Where will I sleep?" God will provide what you need through others. And it's okay to receive from them. He says, "the worker is worth his keep." Notice there are two groups involved in this mission—those who **go** and those who **give**. Both are necessary. Some of you are givers; others are goers. Both are essential.

Notice, secondly, this becomes a missionary strategy. Jesus describes those who give as "worthy." They're key to the mission because they not only welcome you into their home but they welcome your message. It's like they're a gospel beachhead into the rest of the town.

This happens today. Our newest mission partner, MK Bharti, leads a house church movement in India where thousands have come to Christ the last seven years. Their strategy? A church planter enters a village where no one knows Jesus. He prays, walks through the village, and talks with people about Jesus. He looks for "a person of peace"—someone in the village who

welcomes him and wants to hear more. They ask him to open their house to others and they start discussing the Bible. Often, the person of peace becomes a believer, and then his family and friends. Soon a House Church begins and the church planter trains someone there to be the pastor. That's the strategy Jesus gives and it still works today.

But it's not always that easy. Here's the third thing: we should expect some to welcome us and others to reject us. Jesus explains what to do when people don't welcome you and don't want to hear: leave and shake the dust off your feet. Back then, Jews would shake the dust off their feet when they left Gentile lands. Jesus says if a Jewish home won't welcome you, consider them as Gentiles. And to reject the gospel in this way is a serious matter. Sodom and Gomorrah were notorious in their corruption, and God destroyed them. But all this is to say, we need to manage our expectations: some will welcome you; others won't. It's not because you're not doing your job, it's because they've closed their hearts to the God who loves them.

As I said, the best pregame speech ever. And to borrow a line from coach Brooks, "it's your time." If you're a follower of Christ, you're part of this mission. Jesus accomplishes his mission through ordinary people who are fully devoted and fully dependent on him. We all have a place in this mission:

**Pray:** For some of you, your focus will be prayer. How do you get started? Go on our website, read about all our Mission Partners,

and pick one that grabs your heart and start praying every day for them.

**Give:** For some of you, your focus will be to give. As a church, last year we gave over a half a million dollars to this harvest Jesus talked about. But on top of that, many of us are called to give individually. Again, find something that grabs your heart and start giving.

**Go:** For some of you, you'll be called to go. Maybe you go on one of our upcoming mission trips to Greece or Honduras. In a sense, we're all called to go, if not to another country to our own neighborhood and where we work.

**Serve:** Finally, for some of you your focus will be to serve. Finding a place to serve here at CPC is being a part of this mission. I think of the 50-plus people who serve in our CPCKids ministry every Sunday morning. They do that because God sent them there and they're part of this mission.

No matter what your place is in this mission—and we all have one—it's your time to step up and be part of what God is doing in this world. Why? Because Jesus accomplishes his mission through ordinary people who are fully devoted and fully dependent on him.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*