

"7 And He *summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits; 8 and He instructed them that they should take nothing for their journey, except a mere staff--no bread, no bag, no money in their belt-- 9 but to wear sandals; and He added, "Do not put on two tunics." 10 And He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave town. 11 "Any place that does not receive you or listen to you, as you go out from there, shake the dust off the soles of your feet for a testimony against them." 12 They went out and preached that men should repent. 13 And they were casting out many demons and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them." Mark 6:7-13, NAS95.

When people find your new faith in Jesus Christ, and your enthusiasm for religion ridiculous there is nothing 21st century in this at all. Such coolness is so old-fashioned. People treated Jesus just as suspiciously. The world is always scornful of real faith because light shows up darkness. They are saying that 'nobody can know', while you are saying to them the very opposite, "I know! I know whom I have believed. Jesus Christ is my Lord and my God."

"He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them" (v.5).

God's power is not limited by man's unbelief. We were dead in trespasses and sins, our hearts at enmity with God and yet the Spirit came upon us and made us alive and gave us repentance and saving faith and made us new creations.

This is the greatest work of all. And no matter how men respond to it in their natural condition and self ascribed beliefs, it will continue until Jesus comes, not just to Nazareth but to the earth to claim His bride, His church, forevermore.

Regardless of the rejection of the kingdom and its message the work of advancing the kingdom goes on. Rejection is expected.

This is what Jesus is explaining to His disciples in this text. He places it all in the context of many known practices by various types of people.

A century ago there was a Marathi Indian poet called Narayan Vaman Tilak, who on a certain occasion was traveling by train in India. He happened to sit opposite an English Christian who treated him with interest and respect. It was a long train journey and when they affectionately parted the Christian gave Tilak a New Testament. "Read it,"

he said, "and in two years you will become a Christian." That is a fascinating and bold statement to make, but if you think of it there are few people who have read the Bible openly and seriously for two years, asking God to help them understand what they are reading, who have remained unbelievers. So Tilak began to read the New Testament and the book gripped him. "I could not tear myself away from those burning words of love and truth." Two years to the day from meeting that kindly Christian on the train, Tilak was baptized in Bombay. I say that it is indispensable that we live credible godly lives before our neighbors, but more was needed to make Tilak a Christian than the kindness of his traveling companion. He needed the word of God to explain the grace of this believer.

6:7-13 Sharing of power (see Mt. 9:35-10:15; Lk. 9:1-6). In spite of unbelief, the work of spreading the good news had to go on, and so Jesus sent out the Twelve on a mission. The gospels differ slightly in describing what the apostles were to wear and to take with them, but that is not important. All agree that they were to 'travel light'. They were not to be primarily concerned about food or accommodation; they must realize that their mission is one of life and death for their hearers.

It was customary to send heralds, or messengers, by twos, in both Greek and Jewish culture. In Judaism, such pairing also provided validation for their testimony. (Deut 17:6; 19:15)

They are to travel light, like some other groups: (1) peasants, who often had only one cloak (though they did not travel much); (2) some traveling philosophers, called Cynics; (3) some prophets, like Elijah and John the Baptist. They are to be totally committed to their mission, not tied down with worldly concerns. The "bag" would have been used for begging (like the Cynics' bags).

A Nigerian missionary has how he had noticed the encroachment of the Muslim teachers coming down from the north of Nigeria into the south with a little bag on their backs and nothing else. They go to the markets and sit down in the line of stalls, and put their open Koran in front of them and wait for hours until someone asked them

questions, and then they would talk to anyone about the message of Mohammed until no one wanted to talk any more. The Muslims were doing that free of any encumbrances, and not asking the people for any money, while increasingly the Christian church in Nigeria was preaching the heretical 'prosperity gospel' that God wants everyone to have a Mercedes. This preacher told how he coveted that Islamic simplicity as having something of the New Testament's radical discipleship about it, and he compared it to the elaborate ways American missionaries were supported. He was an American. What he was saying is that the church needs to learn the lesson of living in dependence of God's provision. I realize that men going to the third world from the West are going to need some layers of support. The challenge is arranging that and living simply.

I remember when we were considering a move to Poland and we asked about the level of support we would need. We were told that there were three approaches we could take. We could live as an everyday Pole (not including ministry expenses for administration etc.), like a well off pole or like an American living in Poland.

The range was 300-1500 per month.

These disciples were being taught from the very beginning of their ministries that the Lord who commands will also provide. Depending on the one who sends us, we will lack nothing essential to our mission. We will be fully equipped for our vocations. We all need to learn that lesson constantly, and as we mature God has his ways of testing us, and letting us experience this great reality for ourselves. These twelve young men all lived in Galilee; they were all about a day or two's walking distance from their homes, so they had that security at the back of their minds. If things went terribly wrong they could always go home. Peter's wife would cook him a meal as soon as she saw him coming through the door, but they never needed to go home. This first mission for Jesus was a gentle introduction to a future life of far greater rigor and suffering, preaching the gospel all over Israel and around the eastern Mediterranean, looking to the Lord to provide for them there day by day. Like Gideon's men reduced to a final

few hundred who trusted in God the Twelve had to go forth depending on the Lord.

You don't seek your own advancement through Christian work. That's what the prosperity hucksters parading their flashy suits do. The birds of the air live in the confidence that the Creator will supply their needs. These young men were not to think in terms of an elaborate support system, with the structures preachers see today as necessary, family health care, and pension schemes, air travel taken care of, and provisions for every eventuality guaranteed. With all that in place what need do men have to serve God in faith? But if preachers are not trusting in the Lord to provide for them what credibility do they have in telling a congregation, "Just trust in him! That's all you have to do, and he will save you and keep you and supply all your need richly in Christ Jesus."

In Jesus' day, hospitality was highly valued. Like some of the early synagogues, early churches found it most practical to meet in homes and to use them as a base of operation in reaching the rest of the community.

6:11. "Shaking the dust off" meant essentially treating these Jewish cities as if they were unclean, pagan cities, no dust of which the true followers of God would want remaining on them. Jews often shook off the dust of heathen places when they had left them, but on this occasion the disciples were to do it as a solemn legal witness to the rejection of the gospel.

We see examples of this throughout the Bible. There was a time in Old Testament history at the division of the nation when Jeroboam became king of Israel. He didn't want the Jews of his new northern kingdom to be going down to the feasts in the Temple in Jerusalem in the southern kingdom of Judah, so he rejected the Temple and the priests who served there. He substituted his own clergy, and he built in the north two temples with goat and calf idols. What did the Lord's priests and Levites do? They brushed the dust off their feet and they moved to the southern kingdom of Judah. "The priests and Levites from all of their districts throughout Israel sided with him [Rehoboam king of Judah]. The Levites even abandoned their pasturelands and

property, and came to Judah and Jerusalem because Jeroboam and his sons had rejected them as priests of the Lord. And he [Jeroboam] appointed his own priests for the high places and for the goat and calf idols he had made. Those from every tribe of Israel who set their hearts on seeking the Lord, the God of Israel, followed the Levites to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices to the Lord the God of their fathers. They strengthened the kingdom of Judah and supported Rehoboam son of Solomon three years, walking in the ways of David and Solomon during this time" (2 Chrons. 11:13-17). Here were the godly in the whole northern nation who walked! They quit Israel and moved to worship in Israel.

Jesus committed to the Twelve his power to cast out demons, but we can see from v 12 that their main task was preaching the gospel that leads to the casting out of demons and healing of the sick. Anointing with oil is symbolic here, not medical, as it seems to be in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10). There is no record of Jesus ever having used oil, and there are plenty of examples in the NT of healing without it. Jas. 5:14 is therefore not a universal rule, but an outward aid to faith; there is nothing magical in the oil itself. The oil is easily a symbol of the Holy Spirit.

This was his third preaching tour. You notice that it was not enough for Christ to be a silent loving witness showing by the integrity of his daily life that he knew God.

The character we show to others is absolutely important. The idea of life as witness is biblical. However, that does not preach the gospel.

It was not enough for Jesus to live silently for over 25 years in Nazareth and to grow in favor with all the people there. The people of that village needed a clear and precise window into the person of Christ, who he was, and why he came into the world.

Without that illumination they lacked understanding, and without the word of God they wouldn't have discerning commitment. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. So we are told that "Jesus went around teaching from village to village" (v.6), but now his ministry develops and it spreads in a very significant way. One day Christ called the twelve to him. "What does he want to see us for?" they might have

asked one another. The time had come for them to be given new responsibilities. They were going to become preachers: "he sent them out two by two" (v.7). The Lord had called them, first four fishermen, then Levi the tax collector, then the other seven. He had designated them to become 'fishers of men'; he had been teaching them for months, and now he judged them ready to be commissioned. Much about these young men was immature and imperfect. They were untried men with a limited grasp of who Christ was, and a poor understanding of themselves. They'd never preached a sermon, but the spread of the gospel doesn't depend on the perfection or the merit of the preachers but on the call of Christ, and obedience to that call and the equipping of Christ. Think how God could use a grumbling disobedient man like Jonah. Through his messages the city of Nineveh was changed, because Jonah told the people the words the Lord gave him. Of course disciples mustn't teach error, and the more truth and godliness they have the better, but there is one thing that is paramount and it is this: what Christ says, they must say. When he says, Stop, then they must stop; when he tells them to do something they must do it, and they continually look to him that his promises be fulfilled as they serve him each day. Trust Jesus, and obey, for there's no other way.

Although we cannot say that this is exactly what occurred, let's use this as an illustration to at least grasp the enormity of the mission these men were sent out to accomplish in Jesus' name.

According to the first century Jewish historian Josephus there were 204 towns and villages in Galilee. As the Lord sent his disciples out in pairs, then six pairs of disciples visiting each town, let's say for about a week, would mean that this outreach was to last about nine months. It was to be an immensely successful mission. We know that because many of the people they spoke to welcomed the message and began to follow the disciples all the way back to Christ. We are told, "The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going . . . they did not even have a chance to eat" (vv.30 & 31). The Twelve had no time to themselves. Peter, for example, wouldn't have been able to

spend time with his wife because the crowds were pressing in on them wanting to hear more. They had attracted five thousand men to Jesus (v.44). When the Twelve sailed across the Sea of Galilee to get away from the crowds for a time they were completely unsuccessful. The men hurried around the lake, and they were waiting for them when the boat grounded on the shore. That was the impact of the ministry of these twelve men in nine months on the people of 204 communities.

Christ gave them authority over evil spirits. He gave them authority; they had none in themselves. Our only authority is the authority of the one who sends us. Then he gave them authority over evil spirits. There can be no doubt that such spirits exist and were particularly active during our Lord's earthly ministry. The Lord's ministry was never word only; it was always word and act, because God's divine kingdom was advancing. If there is a truth that Mark constantly returns to in his narrative of the life of Christ it is that our Lord's miracles confirmed his credentials for his claims to be the Judge of the whole world, to be the resurrection and the life, to have existed before Abraham, to be the way and the truth and the life, to be one with his Father, and so on. His miracles were signs that attested the truth of Jesus' words. This authority Jesus now gives to the Twelve (v.7). As never before nor since that period when the Lord Jesus walked this earth, evil spirits possessed many men and women, opposing Christ and his work.

So you see the scene as it's being built up here? The disciples entered a village in twos, and preached to the community, and then perhaps, some men or women became particularly agitated, shrieking out, foaming at the mouth, or some deeply troubled people were brought to them whose lives were being ruined by the works of the devil. The disciples, with the authority of the Lord Christ, were enabled to deliver them from these demonic influences so that they stood before their parents or husbands or wives in peace. Such exorcisms made a great impact on the entire village. More than that, other sick people were brought to them and then the two preachers would anoint them with oil and we are told that there were many who were healed (v.13). You can see how this might silence the voice of the skeptics and many might pay attention to the teaching of the Twelve.

It really does not take much to follow the example that we have been given in this account of how to obediently engage ourselves in the preaching of the Gospel.

We need to have the proper motive and that is advancing the kingdom of God.

In Christ's model prayer in the Sermon on the Mount He shows how to pray for the kingdom.

Jesus, with His incarnation has inaugurated the kingdom of God. The kingdom as God has purposed it throughout human history has begun. This is the rule of God under which there is life. This kingdom never existed until Jesus arrived. People were saved by grace before now, but there was not a kingdom of life as it now exists. The people of Israel were a picture, a physical type of the kingdom that was to come physically and spiritually. The present kingdom is such because God has written His law on the hearts of His kingdom people. It no longer exists on two tables of stone as a summary of the Law and the Prophets and a legal binding document for Israel. Christ's law is engraved on the heart of every true believer. And yet the fullness of the kingdom will not come, it will not be consummated until Christ's return.

So in praying for the kingdom to come, Jesus is instructing the disciples to pray that the evidences of the present kingdom will be manifested in the life of the church as it extends beyond the day of Pentecost and beyond the city of Jerusalem and beyond Samaria and into the whole world. It is a prayer to taste the kingdom now knowing that the fullness of it is yet to come and that it will come in all of its glory when Christ appears to resurrect His own and then bring final judgment at the second resurrection.

In this part of Mark's narrative we have a good example of how to go into the world to accomplish the work. Of course we realize that will not nor do we always need to have the attendant works of power such as healing and casting out demons to preach the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit, but should God have it in his purpose at anytime for these things to occur, they will when and wherever God has seen fit for it to be that way.