

OpenTheo

Matthew 10:11 - 10:15



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg continues his exposition of Matthew 10, where Jesus sends out his twelve apostles on their first preaching mission without him. Gregg discusses how the apostles were to greet households when they arrived, and how they were not to charge for their services. He also touches on how the apostles were not to judge whether a town was worthy of their message or not, and how they were not to reject anyone who wanted to follow Jesus, regardless of their background.

Transcript

We're continuing now in Matthew chapter 10, where Jesus sent the twelve apostles out on their first preaching mission without him. And in this place, he is giving them instructions as to how to conduct their mission. He told them that they should go and preach, saying the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

They should heal the sick, cleanse lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. He says they should do this freely. They freely have received, and they should give what they have freely to others.

And this, of course, means they should not charge for it. He does tell them, however, not to provide for themselves either, which sounds like a paradox. He says don't take any gold or silver or copper in your money belts.

Don't take a bag for your journey, etc. I mean, that sounds a bit ironic, because he tells them that they should give for free. And so the natural common sense is, oh, I guess we need to finance it ourselves.

If we're not going to charge, we need to take along enough money for the trip. He says, no, don't do that. He says, because the worker is worthy of his food.

And what I believe he means is that you are working for God. God will take care of you. You don't charge people.

You just go out and do your work for God. Do what he says to do, and he is a just

employer. He will see to it that you're provided for.

And sure enough, God does and did. Now, Jesus continues these instructions in verse 11. This is Matthew 10, 11.

He says, Now whatever city or town you enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and stay there until you go out. And when you go into his household, greet it. If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it.

But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. And whoever will not receive you, nor hear your words when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet. Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.

Now, here is how the disciples are to conduct themselves. They are supposed to find a home base. As they're going on an outreach into a town that they're unfamiliar with, they're supposed to ask around in town to see who is worthy as a host for their activities.

Now, Jesus does not state on what criteria a person would be regarded worthy to be the host of their efforts. Presumably, it would have to be somebody receptive to their message. Although, until they've started preaching, it's hard to know how they would discover who is receptive to their message.

In all likelihood, they were to find somebody who was devout. These were Jewish towns, of course. And therefore, the people were all nominally Jewish, just like, that is, religious Jewish.

They were racially Jewish, probably, for the most part. But they were also, in all likelihood, Jewish by religion. But just as in America 30, 40 years ago, most people in the country were churchgoers, in this country, and yet that wouldn't be the case today, yet even then, not all were true Christians.

And if you went to the average church, you might assume that a large number of the people there are only Christians in name. And you might have to inquire, is there anyone here who's really a devout and sincere believer? And that may have been the position the disciples were in when they came to these Jewish towns. The synagogues, probably everyone in town went to the synagogue, but they were no doubt going to have to ask maybe the leaders of the synagogue, or just ask people on the street, who in the town had a reputation for being sincere and godly and pious? That would be, apparently, what is meant when Jesus said, inquire who in the town is worthy, and go and stay with him.

Now, hospitality in the Eastern world is a very important thing. It's highly regarded, and a godly person would certainly take in guests into his home, especially if they were messengers from God, as the disciples would be representing themselves to be. And he says, when you go into a household, greet it.

I believe this means when you go into the home that you are staying in. Greet it, and he says, but if the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you.

Now, this is interesting, because when he says greet it, he apparently means say something like shalom, which means peace. This is how the Jews would typically greet one another. And so he says, when you come into the house, say shalom.

He doesn't say to say shalom, but when he says, if it's a worthy house, your peace will come upon it. Shalom means peace. When they would say shalom, it would be the same thing as saying peace to you, or peace to this house.

And Jesus indicated that the house would actually receive that blessing, if it was worthy to receive it. But if the house was an unworthy house, it would not receive it. The peace would return to the disciples.

Now, that's an interesting thing, because Jesus talks as if peace is actually a thing, or a substance, or an entity, or a quantity, that the disciples possessed and could confer upon others, upon a house, simply by speaking it. By blessing that house, greeting that house, and saying peace be to you, shalom to you. Jesus indicated that when you greet someone like this, at least when the disciples do, if the house is worthy, it will actually receive that blessing, in the sense that there will be a greater peace on that house.

And yet, if the house is unworthy, even the pronouncement of that blessing will not help it, because that peace will not stick. There's an Old Testament verse in the Proverbs that says, just like a bird that can't find a place to land, so a curse that is undeserved will not alight on its target, on its mark. And apparently, if someone curses you, and you do not deserve that curse, that curse cannot alight on you.

But the contrary seems to be true. If someone says peace to you, and you're not worthy of that peace, then that won't alight also. If the house is worthy, your peace will rest on it.

If it's not worthy, it won't. Now, see, what's interesting about this to me, is that it presupposes a very different set of realities than we normally think about. And that is that if I say peace to you, and I don't typically greet people with that particular expression, but it may be more common that I say, God bless you.

It's sort of the same kind of a thing. You're wishing something upon them, wishing some good thing. But too many times, we do it merely as a formality.

It's just sort of like saying, hello, how are you, goodbye, go with God, God bless you. These statements often are mere Christian niceties that we use, and we never really expect anything to happen as a result of our saying these things. I remember very distinctly once, years ago, when I was single, and I was in my 20s.

I was living in Santa Cruz, California. I had to hitchhike a lot, because I didn't own a car in those days. And I remember once, I was hitchhiking at this one corner, and there was a young lady there who was also, I knew her.

She happened to be there hitchhiking too, and I just happened to be at the same corner. And she was a young Christian, hadn't been a Christian very long. And this person stopped and picked both of us up.

And I intended to share the Lord with the driver, but the ride was very short. The guy was only going a few blocks, and he let us both off a few blocks later. And as I got out of the car, I said, well, God bless you.

And when he had gone off, I said to her, well, that wasn't a very long ride. It didn't get much accomplished. And she says, well, maybe he just needed the blessing.

And it just struck me like a ton of bricks, really, that this young Christian actually believed that when you say, God bless you, someone's going to be blessed. And what was more striking is that it never occurred to me that that was the case. Here, I was an older Christian.

I was even a Bible teacher at that time. And this younger Christian, you know, a little child, she'll lead them. God has hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes, Jesus said.

It never had occurred to me that though I habitually would say, God bless you, upon parting with people, that it never occurred to me that that would really convey anything, that there'd really be any real blessing conveyed. But this young lady just took it for granted that you say, God bless you, and of course, the person will get blessed because of it. And it seems to me like she was more biblical than I was in my thinking.

Because Jesus said, you go into a house, you greet it, you wish it well, you bless it, you pronounce peace upon it. And if the house is worthy, it will actually receive that peace. It'll be a more peaceful house as a result.

But if it's an unworthy house, it will not. So this is really interesting. Like I say, the statement presupposes a worldview different than that which many of us, even many of us Christians, are usually accustomed to thinking about.

Now, in Luke's parallel to this, the same basic discourse is given by Luke in Luke chapter 10, verses 5 through 8. There's more to it than just that. That is, he gives more detail to what Jesus said in this case than Matthew does. Because in addition to the things that we've just read, he says in verse 7 of Luke 10, And remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give you, for the laborer is worthy of his wages.

Do not go from house to house. Whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such

things as are set before you. Now, Matthew's gospel leaves these particular instructions out, just a couple of verses here.

But we might as well have a look at them, since Jesus said them on this occasion, according to Luke. Jesus told them not to go from house to house, but to remain in one house. If they find a worthy house, and a worthy person, and their peace that they offer remains on that house, then they are to stay there, as long as they are in town.

In other words, they shouldn't stay in different houses each night. Especially if they don't like the food at the first place. They're not supposed to go around from house to house looking for a better meal.

He says, eat whatever they give you, and don't worry about that. The laborer is worthy of his wages. Now, it's interesting that he here says, the laborer is worthy of his wages, because he has just told them not to charge, but to freely give.

But he indicates that the free will offering of his host is going to be God's way of paying his wages. That although these men don't come in charge for the gospel, yet God provides for them through willing hearts, like those who will take them in and feed them. When he says, eat whatever is put before you, what he's suggesting, I suppose, is that in some places that they might go, there might be question as to whether the food is kosher.

That is, whether they as Jews would be allowed to eat certain foods, because the Jews had strict dietary restrictions. They couldn't eat pork, they couldn't eat meat strangled, or anything with blood in it, etc. And it may be that he was saying, listen, don't worry about your dietary rules.

Just eat whatever you're given, and don't worry about it. Just eat it, and don't offend your host. Now, if that is true, then we must either deduce that, well, it must be the case that some of the Jews were not very strict in keeping their dietary rules.

If they would serve to the apostles things that the apostles might have to be told to go ahead and eat, because there's some question as to their kosherness. And I suppose there were a lot of people in Judaism who didn't keep those rules as carefully as they should, just as there are Jews today who don't keep those rules as closely as their religion teaches. But the disciples, it is presumed here, might be tempted to turn down some of the food they're offered, because of their conscience.

And Jesus says, no, don't bother to turn it down, just eat whatever is put before you. And this, again, is in keeping with the general teaching of Jesus that you can eat, essentially, anything you want to. It's not what goes into a man's mouth that defiles him, it's what comes out of his mouth that defiles him.

It's what Jesus said elsewhere in Matthew chapter 15. Now, in verse 14 of Matthew 10,

Jesus says to them, And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet. Now, both in Mark and Luke, where it's parallel, it says, Shake off the dust of your feet as a testimony against them.

Matthew leaves out that last line, but that's what Jesus said. When they come to a city, apparently if they find a city where they can't find a worthy house to entertain them, there is no one there who will take them in. The city is altogether unreceptive to their message.

They are not supposed to stay in the city, and they're not supposed to leave quietly either. They're supposed to make a scene. They're supposed to stamp the dust of that city off their feet as a testimony to them.

That means they have to do it in a public way, so that the people would recognize that this is being done. Now, this would be better understood by the Jews than we might immediately think, because the Pharisees had the practice of stamping the dust off their feet whenever they came from a place that they regarded to be unclean, like maybe if they'd been in Gentile territory or in Samaria, and they didn't want to even have the dust of such a place retained on their clothing or on their feet. They would therefore, in a ceremonious and self-righteous way, they would stamp the dust off their feet of that place as if to say, I don't want so much as even a speck of dust to remain on me from that God-forsaken place.

Well, that's how the Jews felt about the Samaritans. That's how the Jews felt about the Gentiles. But here Jesus tells his disciples to do that against these Jewish cities if they reject his message.

These disciples were going to Jewish cities, and if these Jewish cities would reject the message of Christ and of the kingdom of God, Jesus indicated the disciples should treat them publicly the way that the Jews treat the Gentiles. That is, the disciples should shake the dust off their feet as if to announce that they regarded that city as altogether unclean and rejected of God. And indeed, since Jesus gave these instructions, it tells us a lot about Jesus' own thoughts about the Jewish peoples that rejected his message.

He wanted them to know that they were indeed not acceptable to God simply because they had Jewish blood, but they had to also follow the Jewish Messiah. They also had to believe in the Jewish God and his messengers. And when a person, even in the Old Testament, even in the books that the Jews accept as their Bible, you have the same phenomenon that people who were Jewish by blood were not acceptable just on that basis.

If they were worshiping Baal or something else, they were often treated as if they were pagans. And God has always made it the criterion for acceptance with him, not that

someone have the right bloodlines, but that someone have the right attitude toward God, particularly that they have faith as Abraham had faith, faith in Christ. In this case, I mean, when the Messiah came, the Jewish people were expected to believe in him.

And those who would reject his message would be rejected. They would not simply continue to be God's people despite their rejection of God's Son. Now, this is something that I'm sure most Jews and probably even a lot of Christians don't fully understand, because there are still Christians who believe today that the Jews are God's chosen people even if they are rejecting Christ.

But that certainly doesn't have any grounds in Scripture. No one can reject Christ and still be one of God's people because Christ is God's Son. Jesus said, he that does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him in John chapter 5. And Moses himself said, God will raise up another prophet like unto me, and him you shall hearken to.

And it shall come to pass that whoever does not listen to that prophet, he should be utterly cut off from his people, that is, from the people of Israel. Well, that prophet of whom Moses spoke in Deuteronomy 18 is Jesus. And anyone who does not receive Jesus is cut off from the people of God.

There's no two people of God, two peoples, those who accept Christ and then the Jews who reject him. There's only one people of God, and that is the people of the Messiah, the followers of Christ. And for some reason, a lot of people want to give the Jews a blank check to do whatever they want to and still be God's people, but they don't want to do that to other races.

They won't do that to the British or the Japanese or to the Australians or to the Germans or to the Chinese or to the Vietnamese. For some reason, there's a certain racism on the part of some Christians that causes them to put one race of people above another, even though they reject Christ. Certainly, Jesus didn't allow this.

John the Baptist didn't allow this. When he said to the Jews, don't think to say in yourselves, we have Abraham as our father. God could raise up from these stones children of Abraham.

And Jesus said to certain Jewish people who were rejecting him in John chapter 8, you are not of Abraham, you are of your father the devil. And so it's quite obvious that being Jewish is no guarantee of being right with God any more than being any other races. God does not evaluate people in terms of race.

He is not a racist, although some Christians are and some Jews are and some non-Jews are. There's an awful lot of racist people out there, but God isn't among them. And so it is that whereas the Jews of Jesus' day often thought that they were, by virtue of being

Jewish, superior to the Gentiles, and to the Samaritans, Jesus said to the disciples, if they reject this message of the kingdom of God, even though they are Jewish, treat them as if they were Gentiles.

Stamp the dust off your feet as a witness against them that they are rejecting that which makes them acceptable to God. Ah, they're rejecting the kingdom of God. Well, let's read one more verse here and then we'll be out of time.

Verse 15, Jesus said, Assuredly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city. What city? Well, the city that rejects their message, that they stamp the dust off their feet from that city. That city will have a more difficult time in the day of judgment than did or will Sodom and Gomorrah.

Now, Sodom and Gomorrah, first of all, were not Jewish cities. They were Gentile cities. Worse than that, they were exceedingly corrupt Gentile cities, so much so that God had to put them into early retirement and sent fire from heaven and brimstone to utterly consume them way back in the days of Abraham 2,000 years before Christ.

Now, there's been a lot of corruption in the world since then, but God has never felt it absolutely necessary to incinerate a people instantly and cut their career that short as he did Sodom and Gomorrah. We have to assume Sodom and Gomorrah were about as offensive to God as any society could possibly be, that he could not tolerate them any more than that. And yet Jesus says, As bad as they were, their judgment on the day of judgment will be more moderated, will be more lenient than will the judgment of any city.

And in this context, he means of the Jewish cities that reject the message of the kingdom of God and reject Christ. So once again, though Jesus certainly was not an anti-Semite because he was Jewish, how could he be? The disciples were not anti-Semite. They were Jewish, too.

I don't see how a Jew could ever be anti-Semite, nor were the prophets of the Old Testament, for that matter, or David or Moses. But all these people agreed that if you're just Jewish by birth, that is not a ticket. That is not a guarantee of being one of God's people.

You need to also be receptive to God's message. And God's message most recently that he gave to the Jewish people was that the kingdom of God has arrived and the Messiah has come. And there are many, many Jews, by the way, who have accepted that message, just as there are many Gentiles who have.

But there's a far greater number of Jews, just as there are a far greater number of Gentiles, that have rejected that message. And that rejection is fatal. So here we have

these instructions.

Jesus tells the disciples to go out and live by faith, preach the gospel freely, without charge, to minister to people's tangible needs, heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out demons. He tells them to stay in the home of somebody who's got a good reputation. Now, this is no doubt because he did not want his message to be associated with the wrong crowd.

Now, Jesus didn't mind associating personally with the wrong crowd. He could handle his own reputation as long as he was present. But the disciples, he didn't want them to have to give answers to people, saying, Why are you hanging out with tax collectors and sinners? He wasn't so sure they'd give as good an answer as he could give.

So he told them, Just hang out with the righteous and preach the gospel. I mean, that is, you live in the home of the righteous and you preach the gospel. And if you get rejected by the whole city, you just reject that city back.

You stamp the dust off your feet. I wonder sometimes whether there comes a time in our own day where it's time for the church to stamp the dust off its feet from a whole society and go somewhere else. It's an interesting and intriguing thought.

I think Christians ought to think about it more. But I have a feeling that the modern church is so thoroughly compromised that it's no longer qualified to stamp the dust off their feet. I think there's an awful lot of holy people stamping the dust off some of the institutional churches off their own feet because of corruption.

But you can see that Jesus wants us to bear testimony to God's rejection and anger at people who reject his word. I hope that none of us may be among them. Tune in again next time and we'll continue our study in the Gospel of Matthew.