

Title: Vested Authority
Text: Matthew 10.1-4
Theme: The privilege and responsibility of following Christ
Series: Matthew #57
Prop Stmtnt: Jesus calls us to follow him, really!

Read Text: Matthew 9.35-10.4

The three-year old civil war in Syria continues to create an humanitarian crisis. 150,000 people have been killed and another 3,000,000 have been displaced, most of them as refugees. 1.5 million of them have gone to Lebanon. Lebanon is a country that is basically the size of St. Clair, Macomb, Oakland, Livingston, Washtenaw and Wayne Counties, combined. The 4 million people of Lebanon now have an additional 1.5 million people from Syria who had to escape. Some of them came with nothing other than the clothes they were wearing. How would you look at 1.5 million people descending upon our region with no money, no jobs, no clothes, no food and no place to live? When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion. And then he told his disciples to pray. Pray that the Lord of the harvest would send forth laborers into the field because the harvest is so great. There is not a shortage of harvest, but a shortage of workers. In the city of Zahle (Lebanon's 3rd largest city) is the True Vine Church, a Baptist congregation of about 50 people. This congregation (about the size of one of our ABF's) is caring for and serving 750 Syrian refugee families (3000) in their area and running a school for Syrian children. This is no powder-puff Christianity for them, is it? Let's not kid ourselves. Many of you would not do well with this. Many of you have no area of ministry in which you serve in your own church. Your idea of sacrifice is serving in the nursery once a month. You cannot give substantially to the church because you spend too much on cell phones, cable TV, eating out and timeshares. If you cannot identify a specific ministry in this church where you are faithfully serving, what makes us think that we are ready for what is coming? How serious are you about the gospel? How much does it really matter to you? For more than a year, the True Vine Church has been distributing food boxes daily and the school of over 200 children had to add a second shift to accommodate more children. And now? Some of the refugee families who are Muslim are coming to church.

One of the most attractive elements of the life of Christ is how he leads from out front. He is not isolated or insulated from what is going on. He sets the mark and calls us to keep the pace. Jesus never calls us to do something that he isn't willing to do, or hasn't already done. We see that here in Matthew 10. 1) He sends out disciples to do what he has already done. Notice verse 1. He gives the 12 disciples authority over unclean spirits to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction. If you have never done that before, that is more than a bit intimidating. That is terrifying! But, Jesus has been doing this for two chapters now (8-9) because he is preparing his disciples for their mission. He has been a model for them. He has shown them how to do this. But there is more, as we will see in the coming weeks. 2) He prepares them for what they are going to face in the future (persecution, even death) knowing that he is going to face it first. He never asks us to go through something that he himself did not already endure. But, not only that, he teaches us to live this way and lead this way. Matthew 9 ends with Jesus

commanding his disciples to pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.

I was working on this part of the sermon Wednesday afternoon and realized that though I had preached this text on Sunday, I had not since then prayed earnestly to the Lord to send laborers into his harvest. I had to stop and confess my failure to obey God in this matter and then I prayed for God to raise up people to go into the harvest, that is to love the unlovely, the broken, the needy, the exhausting, and the helpless by going to them and serving them so that we can tell them about Jesus. I thought, I cannot preach a text that I am not applying to my life. And then I thought, Jesus would never do that. That is the point. Jesus always lived what he taught. There was no credibility gap between his words and his life. But do you see what he is doing here? He is teaching his disciples not to have a credibility gap in their lives as well. In other words, if you are going to pray about something, then you had better be willing to be used by God as the answer to the prayer.

He commands us to pray about something, which is tantamount to calling us to be willing to go. Do you know what happens in chapter 10? Jesus formally identifies 12 men as his disciples and then sends them on a short-term missions trip. He says pray, then he calls, then he equips and then he sends. I want you to understand what is going on in this chapter. Jesus is turning up the heat. This is what it means to follow him. This is no game. This is real and it is serious. It is forever.

I. Following Jesus is a serious call.

Matthew does not specify when this calling took place. The language that he uses just points out that it took place. Mark and Luke recorded that by this time in the ministry of Christ, there were 12 men who had already been identified as “the twelve.” So, while Matthew does not speak directly about the specific time when Jesus identified them as “the twelve” Matthew is picking up on the fact that he did call 12 men to be specifically identified as such. What do we learn from this?

A. They were called by Jesus.

These guys did not apply for the position, turn in their resumes, sit down for interviews and submit references. The fact is, there is nothing about their prior accomplishments that is mentioned. The emphasis is NOT on what they bring to the table and all of the promise that they show and the potential that is just waiting to be tapped and unleashed. The only qualification that they have is that they were called.

B. They were called by name. (they were known, individually and collectively)

Matthew lists them in 6 pairs. The first two pairs are brothers and those four were all fisherman. Peter is listed first and Judas Iscariot is listed last. By the way, if you were Matthew, writing this account on your own, in order to make Jesus look really good it is doubtful that you would include Judas Iscariot on your list, since it would have the

potential of being an embarrassing admission that Jesus called a man to be part of the twelve who would betray him. But, Matthew wasn't writing this with spin. He wrote what the Spirit of God directed him to write and Jesus did, knowingly, pick a man to be part of the twelve who would betray him. This man would not only betray him, but this man was a thief and Jesus made him the treasurer of his little non-profit organization, thereby ensuring that there would definitely not be a profit. Why would Jesus pick a thief to be treasurer, and pick Judas who would betray him? I think there are several related purposes that I will touch on in the coming months. I will mention two this morning. Judas fulfilled the OT prophecies of the betrayal of the Messiah. Jesus picked him in order to carry out the plan of God. But, why did he make him treasurer? John Piper suggests that it was because Jesus was illustrating by his own life that he really did not put his trust in money. He trusted God on a daily basis to provide exactly what he needed. He trusted God so much, that he did not care if his own treasurer was a thief. But, note that he also picked 11 others who would desert him.

C. They were a mess.

These men are often portrayed in an unflattering manner. The truth is, they were very human, very raw, prone to self-centeredness, prone to self-glory, prone to pity, prone to pettiness and often times mentally dense and spiritually dull. Humanly speaking, Jesus could have seemingly done much better. They fight, they bicker, they are bothered by children, they find fault with a woman who wants to worship Jesus, and a couple of them (James and John) get their mom to ask Jesus if her boys can sit on his right and left in the kingdom because they are obviously concerned that at this point it is going to Peter and Andrew. And Jesus is going to give the keys of the kingdom to them? These are the guys who are going to reach the world with the message of Christ?!?

D. They were put on a list.

In 2008 Brandon Eich contributed \$1000 to support Proposition 8 in CA which was a proposition to define marriage as being between a man and a woman. The list of those who supported this ballot initiative was made public and since Brandon was the CEO of a tech company, his company was targeted by protestors and a couple of months ago, Brandon was forced to resign.

These 12 were on a list. Matthew wrote this gospel account in the late 50's or early 60's. Most of these men were still alive. By writing this account and putting his name on it and the names of the others, he was potentially jeopardizing their lives. "The Twelve" were known and wanted. Following Jesus is a serious call.

Do you realize that if you are a member of this church that your name is on a list? Do you realize that everything that you have said about Jesus on Facebook, Twitter, by texting or other forms of electronic communication can and may be held against you? Do you realize that when Jesus calls people to follow him, he calls them publicly. That is one of the reasons why baptism is always presented as "believer's baptism." It is the public

profession of faith of one who is saying, “I am on the list. Count me as a follower of Jesus Christ. And yes, I realize there may be a price that I am called to pay for this.

E. They were empowered.

The call to follow Jesus is a serious call, but you are not left alone. Christ equips you and he empowers you to do what he calls you to. Here Jesus gives them authority to cast out unclean spirits and to heal every disease and every affliction. They were empowered to do exactly what he had been doing for the previous two chapters. This authority to cast out demons and to heal seemed to be limited for the duration of their mission, since later on there was a boy brought to them who was demon possessed and they were unable to cast it out. But, my point is, they were sent on a mission by Jesus only after they were given the authority to carry out what they were called to do.

F. They were also apostles.

Disciples are those who follow and apostles are those who are sent with a message. Because they were disciples (those who were under the tutelage of, those who followed) they were also called to go. They were called to go, because the one they followed went first. And do not miss the connection between the compassion of Jesus upon the people over the failure of Israel’s leaders and the response of Jesus to send out his representatives to tell the people of Israel that a new King has come. We will get into this more next week.

II. God has a plan that he is carrying out.

The calling, empowering and deploying of these men is part of his plan.

A. It is intentional.

This text initially sounds like it is just some practical details, doesn’t it? Matthew is telling us how Jesus was getting organized. He is taking this movement and is giving it a bit of structure and definition and he looked around and happened to pick out these 12 guys, right? There’s more to it. There is nothing random with the plan and the particulars of the plan of God. The number 12 was intentional. Jesus had 12 disciples to correspond to the 12 tribes of Israel (19.28). These guys constituted the New Covenant people of God. They were being called by Christ to provide leadership to people that Jesus just described as being like “sheep who did not have a shepherd.” Make no mistake that this number was not lost on the Pharisees who were no doubt irked to the moon about it. This helps us understand why, after Judas Iscariot defected, deserted and betrayed Christ, that the disciples had to find a replacement to get the number back to 12 (Acts 1.21-26).

This brings up an interesting point. I don’t want to spend much time on it, but there were a number of good men who followed Jesus who were not named by Jesus to be part of the 12. Obviously, one of them was Matthias who was chosen in Acts 1 to replace Judas

Iscariot. He followed Jesus from the day that Jesus was baptized by John. The fact that he was not chosen to be part of the 12 did not deter him from continuing to follow Jesus. If I was preaching from Acts 1, I would speak more to this, but I will leave it to you fill in the blanks on that.

The calling, empowering and deployment of these men was intentional. Jesus knows what is coming. He knows what is coming this afternoon and what is coming next week. He knows what is going to happen next month, next year and in twenty years. He not only knows it, but he loves you enough to help you get ready for it. There are at least three things that Jesus has in view when he calls the 12 to be identified specifically as his disciples. 1) They need to get ready for the mission that he is sending them on in chapter 10. 2) They need to get ready for the greater mission that he will be sending them on in Acts 1. 3) They need to know how to disciple and train others to carry out the mission of the church. Jesus knows all of this. His plan to call, train and deploy these 12 men is intentional. It is also articulated, at least to a point.

B. It is articulated.

These 12 guys do not know all of this and Jesus does not tell them everything at once. He tells them what they need to know for now. He gives them all that they need to know to trust him and to obey him even though he doesn't tell them everything that he could. We are going to hear this message resonating with them: "Your future is inescapably linked with your faithfulness to Jesus." And your faithfulness to Jesus is going to be tested. Look ahead to verses 16, 24-25, 34-38. Brothers and sisters, that is true for you and me. Your future is inescapably linked with your faithfulness to Jesus and your faithfulness to Jesus is going to be tested. You may have a respect for Jesus, an interest in Jesus, even a partial belief in Jesus to the point where you confuse that with actually being a follower of Christ. You are going to be tested. The authenticity of your faith is going to be tested. What you really trust is going to be tested. This is what Jesus is preparing to tell these guys, because they are the first recruits. What happened to them is what is going to happen to us. It is the plan of God for our true belief to be tested. The plan of God is also to be obeyed.

C. It is to be obeyed.

By the way, God does not tell you everything up front either. But, what God has revealed is enough for you to trust him and obey him today. Our lack of obedience is never because we lack adequate revelation. We have all that we need, even though it may not be all that we want. What happens here is not only a specific event in the ministry of Christ and the plan of God, but it is a preview of another step, and many other steps in the plan of God.

III. Following Jesus carries an enormous responsibility.

A. Followers of Christ have a vested authority.

These disciples did not have their own power, or their own message. They were disciples. They were apostles. They were following and representing another. They were representatives of One who was going to be rejected and killed. Jesus was preparing them for the same kind of fate. Now, here is the tendency. We are attracted to some of the aspects of Jesus, but we do not like the cost of discipleship. So, we try to figure out how we can have the benefits of being associated with Jesus, without having to pay the price of discipleship. But, when people do that, they end up setting themselves up as the final authority seeking to determine what parts of Jesus they want to keep and what parts they want to let go. It is easy to forget that we are the followers. We do not define Jesus, he defines us. Therefore...

B. We can only say what Jesus has said.

The 12 were sent out with a message. They were not permitted to change that message or add to it, nor take anything away from it. When the opportunity arises, or when asked...

C. We must say what Jesus has said.

We must speak up, even though there is a price to pay for speaking up. To not say what Jesus has said when we have the opportunity to do so, is to deny Christ in that moment.

D. We can only do what Jesus has given us the power to do.

These men were given a mission with explicit directions. Jesus gave them authority to carry out exactly what he had called them to do.

E. We must do what Jesus has given us the power to do.

And he will take care of the rest.

This week I had lunch with a man and his wife who are from Syria and are currently living here. They have been attending here for a few weeks and so Cathi and I wanted to hear their story. They are followers of Christ and for many years were able to live and serve as Christians in Syria. He was a pastor. Syria is in the midst of a terrible civil war. As many of you are aware, the Muslim world is bitterly divided between the Shiites and the Sunni's. The Shiites are separated into a little over 20 different sects. These sects tend to stay loyal to one another. Some of the sects are more tolerant to Christians than others. Some of them are extremely hostile. There is one particular group that everyone feared. No one dared attempt to bring the gospel to them, for you would most surely die. And yet, God gave this man a vision and told him that he needed to go to this particular group. So, he did and in his case, he did not die. In fact, the Lord was giving several of these Muslims visions of Jesus, dreams of the cross and other signs that prepared them, so that when this man came, they were waiting for him.

In one case, the Sheik of an entire region came to faith in Christ and as you can imagine, this was not received well. The cousin of the Sheik was an Imam and the Imam told the Sheik that he had 3 days to renounce his faith, or the Imam would kill him. So, the Sheik called the pastor and asked him to come to his house. With more than a little bit of concern the pastor went. The Sheik had gathered his entire family into his home so that they could all hear his instructions. He told the pastor that when he dies, he wanted the pastor to take care of his funeral so that it would be a Christian funeral and so that others would hear the gospel. He wanted his family to know without any question that he is a follower of Christ and is prepared to die for the faith.

Here is what you need to know about your brothers and sisters in Syria. Many of the people who have been Christians for a long time are afraid to speak up because of the persecution that will come their way. But God is raising up a new generation of believers who are coming to faith in Christ in the midst of persecution. Like this Sheik they are coming to Christ with the knowledge that they may die and die very soon. This is a present reality for them. Christianity is a life and death matter. But, the more bold they are, the more people in that country are being reached by the gospel. And the Sheik? What happened to the Sheik? Well, he's still telling his community about Jesus. His cousin, the Imam, who promised to kill him was found to be with cancer and it was him who died within three days.

In Matthew 10 Jesus spells out the cost of discipleship. This is not powder-puff Christianity; this is a call to lose it all. Think about it. Are you in? Are you really in?