

The Sending and Suffering of God's Servants (Part 1)-Mark 6:7-13

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions, please get in touch with Pastor Derek at dberry@calvarybaptistsc.church.]

Take your copy of God's Word and meet me in Mark 6:7...

Perhaps you've seen the 90's movie *Multiplicity*, starring Michael Keaton. In said film, you have a busy man who never seems to have enough time for all his responsibilities; therefore, he creates clones of himself. One clone manages his work life, another his at-home responsibilities, and yet another for miscellaneous deeds. His rationale is that he can't be in his human form; he can't be in multiple places at one time; however, his tasks of life, or his mission, would require just that! And, of course, because no movie is enjoyable without a proper amount of conflict, this plan fails miserably due to the deficiencies of the clones sent out to accomplish his mission.

Well, this concept of multiplicity can also be seen in the Lord Jesus. God in the flesh, the second person of the Trinity, came to the earth on a mission. His ministry can somewhat be summarized in Mark 1:14-15,

¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." -Mark 1:14-15

Based on God's predetermined plan, the Lord Jesus would be limited to time and space by taking on human flesh; however, the mission of God includes proclaiming this gospel in all of Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. And since Jesus is limited by human flesh and returns to his Father in Heaven once his work is complete, he multiplies himself by giving his Twelve Apostles his authority and mission, who in turn plant churches that continue that mission. The good news here is that this plan will not fail due to the deficiencies of the Apostles and Christians today; the gates of hell will not prevail as he builds his church!

In our text this morning, we find Jesus sending off his Apostles to duplicate his ministry, and we also see the suffering of Jesus replicated by his servant, John the Baptist. Churches today must obey the commission of Jesus by continuing their preaching ministry while also preparing for suffering, as in the example of John the Baptist, and ultimately in Jesus. Here are our two points for the next two weeks:

- I. The Commission: Proclamation (vv. 7-13)
- II. The Consequences: Persecution (vv. 14-29)

There's not a one-to-one transfer of every detail and instruction found in this passage that applies to NT churches today; however, there are some. But we must consider the unique moment in salvific history to obtain a proper application for our day. Therefore, we'll consider what components of this passage are exclusive to the Apostles of Jesus' day, and consequently, we shouldn't expect an exact duplication of, along with the commands that have a more direct bearing on the church today. We'll ponder this topic in terms of discontinuity and continuity. And even in the former category, we'll find practical wisdom and application for our day.

Discontinuity:

1. Apostles
2. Authority over unclean spirits
3. Charged with taking nothing on the trip
4. Healed the sick

We'll start with Jesus' original audience, "the Twelve." This title became the official designation of the uniquely authorized delegates of Jesus, known as Apostles. This title has less to do with an official quantity and more with a particular authorized group. Here's what I mean by that. In 1 Corinthians 15:5, Paul says that Jesus appeared to the Twelve. Well, at that time, it would have been eleven because Judas had already taken his life. This goes to show that this term is meant to evoke the newness of what Jesus was bringing. In the Old Testament, God chose twelve tribes and gave his law to his people, which included instructions regarding the day of atonement. In this New Covenant, God takes on flesh, chooses twelve apostles, and provides them with unique authority, through which his New Testament laws would be written, all based on the atonement of the Lord Jesus. For more extensive treatment on the apostles, go to our website and listen or read the sermon where we considered Mark 3:13-20. Speaking of those verses, we find in this text that the promise of verse 14 of chapter 3 is fulfilled.

*¹⁴ And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach ¹⁵ and have authority to cast out demons.
-Mark 3:14-15*

So the author tells us why he appointed the twelve in chapter 3, and now, in chapter 6, we see that the apostles' time has come. But we mustn't forget that the apostles held a unique authority. Christ sanctioned them to write Scripture and command the churches, and Acts 2 refers to what the early church studied as the apostles' teachings. So, the apostles' teachings were on par with Old Testament Scriptures. Something that can be said of no other person throughout the church age. So, the first point of discontinuity is the audience. Although we, as the church, have been sent out on mission, the apostles are in their own category.

Point 2: Authority over unclean spirits.

I'm not going to spend a great deal of time here because it's a subject on which one could spend an entire teaching series, but I will make a few points. To start, I ask you to recall the first point made regarding the uniqueness of the apostles. Remember that they were given a particular authority from Jesus. New Testament scholar Robert Stein states in his commentary on Mark that the original language may suggest a temporary authority given to the apostles for this particular mission trip, which would explain why, in chapter 9, the apostles couldn't cast out a demon.

In chapter 9, the emphasis for casting out demons is prayer. Jesus doesn't rebuke his apostles for a lack of standing in their God-given authority but rather for lacking prayer. Now, if this is true, ultimately, the apostles indeed would have received the unique authority to cast out demons once again, as we see examples in the book of Acts. All of this to say, I don't think it's a stretch to say that these types of demonic exorcisms are not our day's norms, considering there are no longer living apostles. Now, it's crucial that you hear me say, "these types of exorcisms." Because I certainly believe demons are cast out of individuals through prayer and the gospel. Perhaps I can provide an analogy. Based on the pattern I find in the New Testament, I don't think we should expect the laying on of hands for healing as a normative experience. However, God does heal through the prayers of the saints! As a matter of fact, James instructs the congregation to pray when an individual is sick, and that's to be the normative experience in the church.

Similarly, as we fervently pray for possessed individuals and preach the gospel to them, this is the power of God to penetrate a hard heart, cast out a demon, and transfer someone from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. Al Mohler, President of the Southern Baptist Seminary, said this,

“[We] do not have a rite of exorcism, like those prescribed by the Catholic Church, in which clergy members recite prescribed words to supposedly drive away a demon... “There is nothing the demons fear or hate more than evangelism and missions, where the Gospel pushes back with supernatural power against their possessions, rendering them impotent and powerless... Every time a believer shares the Gospel and declares the name of Jesus, the demons and the Devil lose their power.”

Therefore, beloved, do not misunderstand me. We are indeed involved in spiritual warfare consistently and, by God’s providence, will most likely be engaged in demonic exorcisms. But the vehicle in which God has given us is fervent prayer and the gospel proclamation.

Point 3: Charged with taking nothing on the trip

Take notice of verses 8-9. Jesus instructs his disciples to travel light. They were to depend on the typical hospitality practiced in Israel, providing them with all their needs. This was a unique prescription, not intended to be carried out by all missionaries at all times. So why give this command? Although the text doesn’t provide us with a specific reason, there are some plausible possibilities we can consider. First, God may have been teaching his apostles early on to lean on the providential care of their Lord. This is a timeless lesson with relevancy that echoes throughout the ages. It reminds me of a statement in the Sermon on the Mount.

³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. -Matthew 6:33

Directly after instructing his disciples to keep themselves free from anxiety regarding food and clothing, he orders them to seek first the kingdom, and the providence of God would meet all other needs. Coaches and colleges don’t typically allow their star recruits to go hungry. As long as they take care of their side of the things on the field, they have nothing to worry about regarding food. It is the same when you’re on the side of the kingdom advancing the gospel.

Secondly, this command of Jesus may be pointing back to the Exodus. Consider what Yahweh instructed the Israelites to bring as they exited Egypt.

¹¹ In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord's Passover. -Exodus 12:11

It's basically an identical list. Perhaps the Lord Jesus is stressing the urgency and haste of this mission that has overtones of judgment tethered to it. God is about to act. There is a new Exodus taking place under a new and better Moses. One who doesn't just receive the law on the mountain but actually gives the law. One who doesn't just instruct the people on how to make a sacrifice for sin, but one who himself is the sacrifice for sin. And one who doesn't just lead his people out of bondage and then die before receiving the promised land, but the one who leads his people out of bondage to sin and lives forever to welcome us into eternity. Therefore, Jesus may employ these instructions to remind his apostles and us today of this new reality found in Christ.

Point 4: Heal the Sick

We find in verse 13 that the Apostles cast out demons and healed the sick. And this was an authenticating sign that the kingdom was here and that Jesus had sent these men out. So, the preaching and the signs of the kingdom went hand in hand.

Remember, the focal point of preaching the gospel at this time wasn't Christ crucified; the disciples didn't even understand the necessity of a substitutionary death of the Messiah, so we know they weren't preaching it. Instead, their focus was that the kingdom had come! The long-awaited reign of the Messiah is finally here because Christ is here with us! The apostles' preaching would have sounded much like what we find in Isaiah 40.

Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!" Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

And the Israelites would have understood the implications of such a declaration. They were familiar with the OT texts that predicted this future kingdom. And these texts spoke of a time of Jubilee, where sickness and death would be no more. So, imagine hearing that the kingdom of God has arrived while looking around and seeing illness, death, and demonic possession. "Some kingdom! Am I right? How do we reconcile what we know that the kingdom will bring, ultimate healing and deliverance, knowing that these elements are still present in our world, and yet believe a message that the apostles preach about the kingdom arriving?" Well, this is the purpose of the miracles, such as healing the sick! It's evidence that the predicted kingdom has indeed arrived, although not in its complete form yet. This is why the healing ministry of the apostles was so pivotal.

Again, much like the casting out of demons we considered earlier, this isn't meant to be a norm today. Paul makes that clear when considering the gifts of the Holy Spirit when writing to the church at Corinth.

²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way. -1 Corinthians 12:29-31

Now, we consider the practical application of this point for us today since we've considered the discontinuity. What is the normative way believers today showcase that the kingdom has been inaugurated? Through love and unity within the local church. Now, first, remember the focal point of our gospel message has changed. In the ministry of our Lord, Christ was backgrounded while the kingdom was foregrounded. After the ascension, we foreground Christ and him crucified and background the kingdom. So, the gospel of the Lord Jesus dying on the cross for the sins of his people is our central message. In this message of the gospel, we preach that we've been reconciled to God and one another. Well, how, one may ask, can we showcase that we've been reconciled with God and each other in a world so broken and cold? Through a unified, healthy local church. This is why it's imperative that we don't have a weak ecclesiology but rather understand the church's importance.

Consider Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians. In the passage we read earlier, he clarifies that we won't all possess supernatural gifts of healing and tongues. However, the higher gift is that of love. And in the very following passage, he discusses the importance of love in chapter 13. An implication of his point is the fact that we now preach the gospel to the lost, and our signs that Christ has really paid for our sins, and that the kingdom has actually been inaugurated is that we are a people from various tribes, cultures, and ethnicities, and yet we are a unified body who loves one another.

When the world sees two church members at odds due to a severe offense, and yet forgiveness and reconciliation take place, it's a sign of the gospel of the kingdom. When a group of young men visit an older member in a nursing home to encourage them, it's a sign of the gospel of the kingdom. When a church member is broken over a devastating loss, and the congregation rallies around him for tangible support, it's a sign of the gospel of the kingdom. When members share with one another, ensuring there is no lack of provision, it's a sign of the gospel of the kingdom. When a member rejoices with someone who receives a job promotion, that pushes them further than them, it's a sign of the gospel of the kingdom. When the congregation breaks bread with one another and shares burdens and prays with one another, it's a sign of the gospel of the

kingdom. This is how we make an appealing church body. This is the biblical way, not through light shows and fog machines and seeker-sensitive 20-minute fluff messages. No. We create an environment where nonbelievers can break bread with us, sit with us, and view how we treat one another. That's God's way of working. And we can never outsmart God's ordained way of doing things.

Now, let's consider the continuity points, allowing for more straightforward application points.

Continuity:

1. Sent out (Two by Two)
2. Shaking off dust
3. Proclaiming Repentance

Verse 7 says he began "sending them out two by two." A word on the apostles being sent out "two by two" before we consider the more prominent theme of being sent. Jesus could have had in mind the Old Testament requirement for the need to have two witnesses. And, of course, there are the practical advantages of having mutual protection, assistance in preaching, moral support, companionship, etc. Both the OT and the practical benefits probably played a role. And we find the practice of sending out Christian missionaries in pairs modeled in the book of Acts in several passages. So, there's undoubtedly wisdom for our day regarding this matter.

The apostles were sent on a mission to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom and bear witness to that kingdom's message through signs. Jesus, the God-man, has the authority to pass his authority off to these apostles for ministry.

Typically, in the Scriptures, when there's a divine sending by God for a mission, there's an authority provided to the sender for the task. We see it in this text with the apostles, and we also find it in the local church. As believers, we're sent on a mission into a lost world to make disciples of all nations. This includes evangelizing the lost, baptizing, and teaching converts to obey all that Jesus has commanded. But this isn't meant to be a solo assignment but rather a congregational assignment. In other words, discipleship is to take place in the context of the local church.

In Matthew 18, Jesus deputizes the local church. He grants them the authority of the keys of the kingdom to pronounce who's in and who's out.

18 Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 19 Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”
-Matthew 18:18-20

So, Jesus is defining a church and local churches' authority, namely determining who's in and who's out (who is the right confessor with the right gospel). This idea of just showing up and being named among the number is foreign to the New Testament. It doesn't work when you consider the language employed in the Scriptures. When you consider this heaven and earth language, it sets the Great Commission passage in context.

18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
-Matthew 28:18-20

This is why church-shaped missions and evangelism are so important. The preachers and pastors during the first Great Awakening in this country understood this concept, so those who were being converted were flocking to local churches. Since then, we've divorced the idea of mission and the church. All we want is for folks to make decisions, pray a sinner's prayer, and walk an altar, with little emphasis on joining a local church. This is not the picture we get in the New Testament. Evangelism was not only an invitation to reconcile with God but also an invitation to join his people in a local congregation. We must scrap an anemic ecclesiology with the church in the background and the individual Christian in the front. It's not the individual Christian authorized with the keys sent on mission; it's the local church sent with authority to bind and loose.

Point 2: Shaking the dust off of feet

Jesus instructs the disciples on what to do if a town them and their message. He leads them to “shake the dust that is in your feet as a testimony against them.” This parabolic act would have communicated a tragic irony. Jews would often shake from their feet when they returned to Israel from Gentile territories—signifying that the Gentiles had no part in God's plan or kingdom. Here, the tables are turned. When they act out this gesture in the land of Israel, it's a declaration of the judgment awaiting them on the final day. Although they're in the land of Israel, the town that rejects the apostles is a pagan place and will be cut off from God unless people repent. We see this practice continued in the Book of Acts.

⁵⁰ But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. ⁵¹ But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. -Acts 13:50-51

There will be times when we'll have to do the same. Consider what the Lord Jesus tells his disciples.

⁶ "Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you. -Matthew 7:6

Sometimes, we must determine if another gospel presentation merely solicits abuse and profanity. Again, this is why a biblical understanding of conversion is so important. All we can do is share the gospel and love with people. It's God who must do the heart-changing. So, tragically, we must, at times, we too must shake the dust off our feet in our own personal relationships. This is particularly hard when it's family members, I know from personal experience.

Point 3: Proclaim repentance

Verse 12 says they went out and proclaimed that people should repent. That is our message. Christianity doesn't teach you to become a better version of yourself. It doesn't teach an easy believism message that all you need to do is check the box of some facts, making you a Christian. No. At its core, the gospel message is a call to repentance.

The English Puritan Thomas Watson had this to say about repentance. "Repentance is a grace of God's Spirit whereby a sinner is inwardly humbled and visibly reformed." Watson identifies six ingredients for true repentance.

1. The sight of sin
2. Sorrow for sin
3. Confession of sin
4. Shame for sin
5. Hatred of sin
6. Turning from sin and returning to the Lord

We'll talk more about the message of repentance next week as we consider John the Baptist's message of repentance to Herod. But for now, we'll close with two points. First,

if you're here, you must determine whether you've repented from sin and placed faith in the Lord Jesus. Second, for members of the body of Christ, you are heralds of this message. I know it isn't an easy message to proclaim to a world in love with sin. However, we are the sent ones of God entrusted with the announcement of reconciliation. Allow me to close with the words of Paul by the Spirit.

¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.^[b] The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling^[c] the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. -2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Let's pray.