

Matthew 10:9-10

Introduction

Very little of this study will actually be spent on the selected text. This is because I will be focusing especially on the proper method that we should use in interpreting and applying these verses. As we'll see, the interpretation and application to our lives of Jesus' teaching in Matthew chapter ten is certainly not as straightforward as the application of other parts of Scripture. And so as always, one of my goals in this study is not just to deliver the fish, but to actually explore how to do the *fishing*. My goal is not just to show you what I believe is the meaning and significance of God's Word, but to equip you to discover this meaning and significance for yourself.

In our last study, we began looking at the instructions that Jesus gave to His disciples before He sent them out to labor in God's harvest. There is much in these instructions that at first glance doesn't seem to have any relevance or application to us. But we believe that "*all* Scripture is breathed out by God and *profitable [to us today]* for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God [*today*] may be competent, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). In fact, we can assume that Matthew included these instructions *because* he believed they still applied to his church as *they* went out to labor in God's harvest (the church is built on the foundation of the twelve apostles; Mat. 10:1-5). So if Jesus' instructions to the disciples are still relevant to us as we labor in the harvest, the next question is: *How* are they relevant?

Jesus says: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Obviously, this doesn't mean that we should all move to Israel or to some Jewish community to proclaim the Gospel, or that we should never send missionaries to a Gentile nation! In fact, Jesus Himself will soon revise His own instructions. He says in Matthew twenty-eight: "Go therefore and make disciples of *all* nations." So do we throw out the earlier instructions as no longer having any relevance for us today? If not, do we invent some creative, allegorical meaning so that we can "make" them apply to us? The answer to both of these questions is "NO!" Instead, we must always look for the timeless and enduring principle behind the instructions. It is this underlying principle that will guide us, and enable us, and empower us even *today* as we go out to labor in the harvest.

So in verses five to six, Jesus tells His disciples to bring the message of God's salvation to the Jews and not to the Gentiles or Samaritans. The principle that lies behind these instructions is God's sovereign right to bring the message of His glorious salvation to some and not to others. The application and relevance of this principle for us *today* is threefold. First of all, we can know that God has placed us where we are in accordance with His sovereign purposes for the evangelization of the nations! This should give us confidence and excitement and joy as we proclaim the gospel to the harassed and helpless sheep that are all around us. We're not where we are by accident. Second of all, we can proclaim that the goodness and mercy of God has come in a *special* way to *all* those who hear our message, because God has not decreed that the Gospel should be preached to every individual who has ever lived. In light of this special and undeserved kindness, we can more earnestly and powerfully urge people to repentance (Rom.

2:4). We also see that according to God's gracious and sovereign purposes, *we* have heard the Gospel, while God has justly and righteously decreed that others will never hear. Therefore, *since* we have received so freely and so undeservedly, we must *give* in the same way! We must proclaim the Gospel freely and joyfully and without holding back. This is the *application* of the *timeless principle* behind the *temporary instructions*.

Jesus went on to say: "And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons." Once again, we have to ask the question: "*How* is this relevant to us?" Obviously, these verses do not obligate us to go out healing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing lepers, and casting out demons. So what is the principle behind these *temporary* instructions that is *permanently* relevant to the church? Well, we remember first of all that all of Jesus' healings actually contained a sermon about the kingdom. And these sermons about the nature of God's rule in the Messiah are just as applicable today as they were in the days of the apostles.

When Jesus cleansed the leper (8:1-4), all the old requirements of ritual and ceremonial cleansing were rendered obsolete. In this way, Jesus showed that ceremonial uncleanness was never the *main* point, because even the outwardly clean can be inwardly depraved. Jesus came to show that in the new age of the kingdom, the leper who believes will be no less spiritually privileged than anyone else. *When Jesus healed the centurion's servant* (8:5-13), He showed that a person's ethnic background had never been the main point, because even a "clean" Jew can be inwardly filled with unbelief. Jesus showed that in the Messiah's kingdom, God makes no distinctions between Jews and Gentiles. All along, the only thing that has truly mattered is *faith*. *When Jesus so compassionately healed Peter's mother-in-law along with all the sick who came to Him* (8:14-17), He showed that one day He would undo and turn back all the effects of God's wrath and judgment upon sin by taking upon Himself the "pains and sicknesses" that God has visited upon His people. *When Jesus cast a multitude of demons out of two men* (8:28-34), He demonstrated His fearful and awesome authority over invisible and supernatural powers. Satan and his demons are *already* subject to Jesus. There is no longer any power on earth that can prevent the advance of the kingdom. *When Jesus raised a girl from the dead* and compared it with waking a person from sleep, He showed that even death itself cannot quench the deep rooted joy of kingdom living (9:18-26). *When Jesus healed the woman with a hemorrhage*, He showed that He brings not just life, but life abundant in the presence of God (9:18-26). *When Jesus opened the eyes of two blind men and caused a mute man to speak* (9:27-34), He showed that in the new age of the kingdom the eyes and ears of God's people would be opened to understand the truth and their tongues would be loosed to rejoice in God's salvation.

These are all things that we still proclaim as we go out and labor in the harvest. We can point people back to the miracles that Jesus and the apostles performed, and then forward to the Christian's hope of the redemption of the body when there will be no more mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore (Rom. 8:18-25; Rev. 21:1-4). We proclaim the good news of a redemption, and deliverance, and salvation that extends fully to *every part* of our spiritual and physical existence. Let us not be guilty of minimizing the greatness of God's salvation! And so once again, we see the *application* of the *timeless principle* behind the *temporary instructions*. So now what about the instructions in verses 9-10?

Verses 9-10 – “Acquire no gold nor silver nor copper for your belts, no bag for your journey, nor two tunics nor sandals nor a staff, for the laborer deserves his food.”

I suppose that some people may try to apply these instructions literally – thinking that the instructions themselves are timeless. In this case, we shouldn’t carry a wallet or a purse, and we should only have one set of clothes in our closet and own only one pair of shoes. But later on, Jesus himself will instruct His disciples to do the very opposite of what He tells them to do here! (Luke 22:35-36 – And he said to them, “When I sent you out with no moneybag or knapsack or sandals, did you lack anything?” They said, “Nothing.” He said to them, “But now let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack.”) So do we conclude that the earlier instructions have no relevance for us today? Or do they have relevance only for “full-time” evangelists and missionaries? What about the new instructions that Jesus gave His disciples – are they also out of date and irrelevant for us? Of course not! So then are we free to invent any meaning and application we want in order to “make” them relevant? Of course not! Once again, we need to see the underlying principle behind Jesus’ instructions, because while the instructions may (and in this case *do*) change, the underlying principle is permanent, unchanging, and *always* relevant for God’s people! So what is the underlying principle that needs to guide us in our thinking and practice today? The answer, I think, is really very simple and very clear. But let’s start by looking at *why* Jesus reverses these instructions in Luke chapter twenty-two.

✓ Luke 22:35-38 – And he said to them, “When I sent you out with no moneybag or knapsack or sandals, did you lack anything?” They said, “Nothing.” He said to them, “But now let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack. And let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one. For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors.’ For what is written about me has its fulfillment.” And they said, “Look, Lord, here are two swords.” And he said to them, “It is enough.”

Jesus is warning His disciples about His coming death and the persecution and hostility that they will soon experience. In connection with this warning about the trials to come, Jesus says that the one who has no sword should sell his cloak and buy one. Obviously, Jesus doesn’t *literally* mean for His disciples to go out and get swords to use in self-defense! Immediately after the word about buying a sword, Jesus says: “*For* I tell you that this Scripture *must* be fulfilled in me: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors.’ For what is written about me has its fulfillment.” If Jesus really wanted His disciples to buy swords for self defense, then it wouldn’t make any sense to talk in the very next breath about His own death as the necessary fulfillment of Scripture! In fact, when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, the disciples asked: “‘Lord, shall we strike with the sword?’ And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. Then Jesus said to him, ‘Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it *must* be so?’” (Luke 22:49-50; Mat. 26:52-54) In light of Jesus’ clear teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (Mat. 5:1-11, 38-48), and in light of *why* Jesus said a sword was needed, the disciples had no excuse for interpreting Jesus’ words literally. This is why when the disciples said, “Look, Lord, here are two swords”, Jesus responded with: “It is enough”. Of course, two swords was *not* enough for any real self-defense! What Jesus is really saying is “Enough of that! That’s not at all what I meant or intended.” The part about buying a sword was just a symbolic picture of the dark and difficult days to come – days of rejection, and persecution, and hostility (cf. Mat. 10:34-39). *And*

this is what explains the need to carry a moneybag and a knapsack. Once again, the point isn't so much that every disciple absolutely *must* carry a moneybag and a knapsack. The point isn't moneybags and knapsacks! The point is that the disciples will no longer be able to rely on the welcome and generosity of the people to whom they have been sent because they will be hated by all.

“The messengers of the kingdom... had known before that they were being sent out as vulnerable sheep in the midst of ferocious wolves. But defenseless and resourceless though they were, in the providence of God they found themselves to be in perfect safety and fully provided for. Now, however, they could no longer take for granted such a privileged passage... In the coming sifting by Satan it will be rather like it had been for Job, when he found himself cruelly buffeted by life as Satan probed for any weak spot” (Hagner).

““Hitherto you have had an easy and prosperous condition, because I wished to treat you gently, like children; the full time is now come, when I must employ you in labour, like men’... He does not call them to an outward conflict, but only, under the comparison of fighting [and carrying one’s own moneybags and knapsacks], he warns them of the severe struggles of temptations which they must undergo, and of the fierce attacks which they must sustain in spiritual contests” (Calvin).

This is the timeless principle behind the specific instructions to carry moneybags, knapsacks, and a sword. We are not promised that kingdom work and witness will *always* be easy or without severe trials such as rejection, mockery, suffering, and persecution. On the contrary, we must be willing to endure fierce attacks and struggles of all kinds as we seek to live as kingdom citizens and witnesses in the world (cf. 2 Tim. 3:12). So now let’s go back to the first set of instructions that Jesus gave to His disciples in Matthew chapter ten.

Contrary to His later instructions, *here* (in Matthew 10) Jesus commands His disciples to “acquire no gold nor silver nor copper for your belts, no bag for your journey, nor two tunics nor sandals nor a staff, for the laborer deserves his food.” Some people seem to think that the only reason Jesus says these things is because “the laborer deserves his food” and so there is just no practical need for all of these things. Others assume Jesus’ point is that the disciples need to trust in God for their provisions. There is probably some truth to both of these things, but I think they both miss the main, underlying principle. The disciples may expect to be provided for by people along the way, but this doesn’t really explain why they are *prohibited* from taking some of their own provisions. Yes, the disciples will have to trust God when they go out empty handed, but that will be no less the case when they go out carrying their own provisions! So what is the unique and timeless principle behind these instructions that will still fully apply to the disciples (*and to us*) even when the instructions have been reversed? Once again, the *point* is not money, and suitcases, and changes of clothes! The point is this: Don’t *waste the time* that would be necessary to go about *acquiring* these things (ESV/NASB; contra NIV/NRSV). Travel light so that you can be *as mobile, and efficient, and unencumbered as possible*. The point is that time is of the essence and the mission is urgent. And even when it will be necessary for the disciples to acquire these provisions and carry them along, the point remains the same and is still just as relevant as ever! Luke tells us that Jesus said: “Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, *and greet no one on the road*” (10:4). Are you getting a sense of the urgency and single-

mindedness that was to characterize the disciples as they went out to labor in the harvest. This is the timeless principle behind the temporary instructions.

Conclusion

As one commentator says: “[A] sense of a *restless compulsion*... underlies Matthew’s restrictions on material provision” (France). Or as another commentator says: Nothing was to be allowed to *distract* from the call to spread the message of the kingdom (Hagner). No distractions, a restless compulsion, a sense of urgency, and single-mindedness – all of these things are to characterize God’s people as they labor to spread the message of the kingdom. In Matthew 6:33 Jesus commands us to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” And now we see that one of the ways that we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness is by faithfully proclaiming the message of God’s salvation at every opportunity *and* by creating and making these opportunities in dependence upon God. We’ve already seen how we are empowered and compelled to proclaim the gospel to others when we understand the sovereignty of God, the grace of God, and the misery of sinners. But now we see that we are truly empowered and truly compelled to proclaim the gospel to others when we see that the time is *short* and the days are *hastening* on to the end. The twelve disciples had a very limited amount of time to accomplish their mission (before the crucifixion of Christ), and in the same way, we also have a limited amount of time to accomplish our mission (before the second coming of Christ). This is not to say that our slowness or laziness can frustrate God’s purposes, but rather that God uses the time sensitive nature of the mission to motivate us to a more diligent obedience and in this way to bring about the guaranteed fulfillment of His sovereign purposes.

- ✓ 1 Peter 4:7 – The end of all things is at hand; *therefore* be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.
- ✓ Hebrews 10:24-25 – Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more *as you see the Day drawing near*.
- ✓ Romans 13:11-12 – Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. *So then* let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.

In light of the shortness of the time, we can’t afford any distractions. Instead, we must have a sense of restless compulsion – a sense of urgency and single-mindedness as we work to spread the message of the kingdom. Now of course, we do have to be discerning in our *application* of this principle. Otherwise, we would have to conclude that *all of us* should sell everything we have and go full time into the work of street evangelism and door-to-door witnessing. Some *are* called and gifted to do this, but not all (cf. Eph. 4:11). And the reason *not all* are called and gifted to do this is because *God* is not in some frantic, and desperate, and hopeless race against time to save as many of His elect as possible (cf. 2 Pet. 3:8-15)! But *in so far* as God has called and enabled *each and every one of us* for the work of evangelism, we need to work *diligently and fervently* in light of the shortness of the time. Is there the ability and even a small amount of willingness to host a neighborhood Bible study? Then don’t put it off. There is no time to delay. Have you ever thought to yourself: “I’ll say something next time”? – Not if you’re aware that the

time is short! Have you ever excused yourself by saying: “There was no natural opening” or “there was no opportunity”? – Not if you feel the urgency of the days hastening on to the end! The time-sensitive nature of our mission will compel us to try initiating a conversation with the quiet and apparently unapproachable person sitting next to us on the plane. The shortness of the time will *motivate* us to take advantage of opportunities where evangelism can happen.

Once again, we have to be discerning in our application of the principle. There are times when we should not open our mouths because it would be to cast pearls before the pigs (Mat. 7:6). There are times when opening our mouths would be inappropriate and actually reflect badly on the Gospel. Remember, God is sovereign, and so we don’t need to act out of desperation. On the other hand, the time *is* short, and so nothing must be allowed to distract us from the call to spread the message of the kingdom. We don’t have forever. In the words of Jesus, our Lord: “Acquire no gold nor silver nor copper for your belts, no bag for your journey, nor two tunics nor sandals nor a staff... and greet no one on the road.” The time is short. The mission is urgent. There is *no* time to waste.

Teaching our Children

“[Jesus] said to [the disciples], “When I sent you out with no moneybag or knapsack or sandals, did you lack anything?” They said, “Nothing.” He said to them, “But now let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack. And let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one.”

Q. Is Jesus mainly talking about moneybags, knapsacks, and swords (wallets/purses, suitcases, and guns)? Is Jesus’ main point to make sure that we all carry these things around with us?

A. No!

Q. When Jesus tells His disciples that from now on they will need to carry their own moneybags, knapsacks, and swords, what is His main point? Why would the disciples need these things?

A. The disciples will need to carry their own provisions because the world will hate them. They will experience rejection and persecution. There will be many trials and hardships. Jesus is warning the disciples that doing God’s work isn’t always easy. It can be very difficult and painful. We must be ready to “fight the good fight of the faith” (1 Timothy 6:12)!

“Acquire no gold nor silver nor copper for your belts, no bag for your journey, nor two tunics nor sandals nor a staff, for the laborer deserves his food.”

✓ For a little while, Jesus kept His new disciples from experiencing any serious persecution or suffering. This is why at first the disciples didn’t need any “swords”, or even extra money and clothes. The disciples could depend upon other people to provide for their basic needs.

Q. Is Jesus mainly talking about money, and bags, and tunics, and sandals, and staffs? Is Jesus main point to make sure that we don’t carry any wallets or suitcases, and that we only have one set of clothes and one pair of shoes?

A. No!

- Q.** Why does Jesus tell His disciples not to get any of these things or carry them along?
- A.** There is no time to waste in trying to collect all of these things. Carrying these things around will only slow the disciples down. They only have a short amount of time to complete their mission.
- (Luke 10:4 – Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, *and greet no one on the road.*)
- Q.** What is one important reason for us to work diligently at spreading the message of the kingdom?
- A.** The time is short! We don't have forever! (Read and reflect on the Scriptures on page 5)
- ✓ Suggest some specific situations in which the principle of the shortness of the time (for the work of evangelism) might affect the decisions we make. (Examples – We will be more *motivated* to take advantage of opportunities where evangelism can happen; We'll stop making excuses like: "I'll say something next time")