

Following Christ Through The Gospels

Part Four

As we have seen already, the Lord Jesus often retires into the quiet place. On this occasion he goes to the mountain with the express purpose of calling twelve men, - disciples, - to Himself. Notice, within this particular context, that He called them with an effectual calling (Mk. 3:13), He ordained them (v.14), and He empowered them (Mt. 10:1; Mk. 3:15; Lk. 9:1). Remember: these twelve disciples were in accordance with Christ's own particular choosing. First of all, why twelve? ... to coincide with the twelve tribes of Israel (in the Old Testament/Covenant). In Rev. 4:4 and 5:8 these twenty-four are mentioned as falling down before the Throne. Secondly, consider the type of men Jesus called to be His disciples. How many of them would we have chosen? ... loud-mouthed, opinionated Simon Peter? ... argumentative, self-elevating James and John? ... 'fiddler' Judas Iscariot? ... 'politically motivated' Simon the Zealot? ... Matthew, - a tax collector!? These were the people Jesus called to Himself with the expectation of fulfilling His purpose while on earth. When we set out to choose our company, we would most definitely have left out some of the people that Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity, chose to Himself!

Now, for this *particular people*, - the twelve disciples, - Jesus had already a *particular path* for them to tread. They were not to go to the Gentiles or to the Samaritans, - but to the children of Israel *only* (Mt. 10:5). Did the Gentiles and Samaritans not deserve to hear the Good News of salvation? Did they not matter? Remember how Mt. 1:23 considers the meaning of the name 'Jesus'. Also Jn. 1:11.

As these *particular people* travelled along a *particular path* they had a *particular proclamation*, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt. 10:7). This was the only message that He directed His disciples to declare. Furthermore, they were also to tend to the physical needs of the people whom they contacted (Mt. 10:8). How were the individual needs of the disciples to be cared for? ... "the workman is worthy of his meat" (v.10).

The subject of evangelism is highlighted here in the early ministry of Christ. Here is His evangelism 'programme':

- * **GO** "These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt. 10:5-7). They were told where to go and where not to go.
- * **PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL OF REPENTANCE** Compare Christ's example (Mk. 1:15) with the command He gave His disciples (Mt. 10:7). This is Christ's Gospel, not some trumped-up idea of what they thought evangelism 'might' be, or 'could' be.
- * **THE PROMISE OF PROVISION** based upon trust in God (Mt. 10:9-11)
- * **HAVE A DEFINITE AIM.** "... enquire who in it [*i.e. the town/village*] is worthy" (Mt. 10:11). Reality in evangelism demands careful and prayerful thought. Pearls thrown at swine is a waste! (Mt. 7:6). Before Christ had completed His briefing of the disciples they could have ran out into the streets with eager anticipation, wandered about aimlessly, and achieved nothing. They had to wait on the Master! They had to receive from Him the purpose of their evangelism. Remember: the purpose of evangelism is not to fill churches; the purpose of evangelism is to find "the lost sheep of the house of Israel [*i.e.* "that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth" (Rom. 9:11)].
- * **THE FRUITS OF EVANGELISM** are twofold: acceptance and rejection. The sun can either melt or harden, similarly the SON. Evangelism is a serious business. It is an absolute joy when the sinner is brought to saving faith in Christ. However, when the sinner rejects God's salvation the terror that hit Sodom and Gomorrah is only a mere drop in the ocean compared to the eternal punishment they face.
- * **THE ENEMIES OF EVANGELISM.** ... "the sheep in the midst of wolves" (Mt. 10:16). Yes, they didn't have to go out to the towns and villages to meet this phenomenon, - there was Judas Iscariot *among them*, the 'son of perdition' (Jn. 17:12). Wherever you have people eager to proclaim the Gospel, you have people equally eager to cause havoc, distress and confusion.

The Lord Jesus then went on to describe the persecution that would threaten the evangelists, - 'rigged' courtroom scenes and unfair portrayals of the disciples activities. Even in this scenario Jesus instructed His followers to uncompromisingly and unflinchingly speak the word of His Father and to rely on the Holy Spirit for unction, guidance and power.

As Christ concluded His discourse He clearly emphasised the meaning of a 'disciple' as being one who learns and continues to grow in knowledge. (Mt. 10:39-42). None of us can ever say we know it all! But if you are a disciple, you will be seeking more knowledge of Christ today than you had yesterday. ... And that knowledge is the very principle upon which living for Christ is founded.

What, then, was the result of Christ's teaching to His disciples? ... "And they departed, and went through the towns, preaching the gospel, and healing every where" (Lk. 9:6). In time, each of these disciples would come to discover that *it costs to follow Jesus Christ, but it costs more not to!*