

God is Calling

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[0 : 0 0] This is, as I said, it's a long chapter. I hope that you'll take time to read it again and pray through it and that God will speak to you beyond this sermon because I'm only going to touch on a couple of very important things in this passage, but I can't possibly cover it all today. And I am very much focusing on what I believe God has put on my heart for you today from this chapter where Jesus is moving from the previous section which came after the Sermon on the Mount where he was doing lots of miracles and proclaiming indeed his power and his glory. And we come to the second section of teaching where he is instructing his disciples what they are to go out and do as they proclaim the kingdom of God. And I want to see how we can take that and apply it in our own lives and what teaching, some of the teaching we can take from what Jesus, his living word is saying to us. So the first thing I want to say is that we have a calling in life. Just as the disciples had a very specific calling here, Jesus calls them, he called to them in verse 1, the twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits to cast out to heal every disease and afflictions. And then he goes on to name the twelve apostles here, the twelve disciples. And we recognize that there's some of the aspects of this chapter and this teaching was very specifically given as the calling to his twelve disciples. They had specific tasks to do, but I do believe there is also commonality. But they were, along with Jesus, the apostles and prophets, and Jesus are the foundation of the church. The New Testament church is founded on the witness and the testimony and the teaching of these apostles. And Jesus here delegates his own power and his own glory. In many ways, what he could do, he gave delegated to them to heal every unclean disease, every affliction, and gave them great power to cast out spirits, even to raise the dead. And that delegated power and authority was hugely important at this foundational time of the very early beginnings of the New Testament church. They have his, Jesus, delegated power and authority. So what they said was attested by the works they were able to do. We see that in Acts twenty-two, where in the Sermon and Pentecost, and this is Pentecost Sunday, men of Israel hear these words, Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know. So the attestation of Jesus' words came from these great miracles. And we also see in Hebrews two, four, that God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to his will, and that went out to these apostles in the early church. We also know that they had the task of preaching only to the Jewish people. The gospel was to go out first to the Jewish people, and then it was to go out to the Gentiles, and they had that specific

role of preaching to the Gentiles. And in this role that they had, they knew fierce oppositions, fierce opposition, especially from their Jewish brothers and sisters and from the religious authorities. And in the instructions Jesus gives, there's also prophecy in many ways, because many of them were brutally oppressed, were demonized, and were indeed martyred for their faith. So in a very specific way, these instructions were given to the twelve disciples, as they were called to proclaim the good news of the kingdom. But we too, in a broader sense, as disciples of Jesus Christ, are called to mission. And whatever else Jesus teaches his own disciples here, he's also reminding us that we have a responsibility, every Christian has a responsibility to spread the good news of the gospel. We might, we are not foundational to the church. We might not have the gift of evangelism. We might not be called to be full-time preachers, but we all have a story to tell. We all have his message, his good news to share. And if we don't, it doesn't. If we don't share it, it doesn't get shared. Now there's great words in Romans chapter 10 and verses 14 and 15, I've taken this from the New Living Translation, but how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? How can they believe in him if they have never heard about him?

How can they hear about him unless someone tells them? And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? This is why the Scripture says how beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news. And spiritually, we are all to be those who have beautiful feet. So you can ignore what I was saying last week to the children. Spiritually, we are to be those who are, we are called as disciples of Jesus Christ. The whole of the church is part of the great commission that is given to that New Testament church to make disciples in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We can't afford to let fear silence us. In verse 28, we have these solemn words, do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul, rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body and hell.

We recognize the value and the urgency and the significance of the message. We know we're valuable to God. We can worship him and adore him. We're not afraid of him, but we can worship and adore him, but recognize that he is the judge of all mankind. And we will all stand before him in judgment. And the only way to stand before him in judgment is covered in the righteousness of Jesus, that Jesus is the one who took our guilt and our punishment and our place. And so we have this great, passionate burden to share the gospel because we are called to do so. Now, that's one thing we can learn, I think, from this chapter.

And I'm just looking at it today in broad strokes. Now, what I'm going to say to you, you're not going to find easy to hear. None of us will find this easy to hear, but it's really important. And the second thing is, therefore, that as the first thing that we're all called to mission, the second thing is that it's tough. It's tough. It's tough to be a Christian, and it's tough to share the gospel. There's that aspect of it that makes it difficult. There's different aspects that make it a challenge to us to live out the Christian life and to share the Christian life. As you were reading, maybe you wondered about these words in verse 34, do not think I've come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace but a sword. Well, isn't that a contradiction? In John 14, 27, Jesus again speaking to the disciples says to them, peace, I leave you. My peace I give you. Not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled. Never, neither let them be afraid. So, what is it to be? Is it that Jesus brings us peace? Or is it that Jesus brings a sword? What is it? Is it peace? Or is it, well, the sword is just really an illustration of division, and he goes on to speak about division in families.

[8 : 56] What's happening here? Well, clearly, when we come to Jesus Christ, we find and have peace with God. We are given peace with God. The barrier of sin has been dealt with in taking away. We're reconciled with Him. We're no longer enemies to Him, and we're no longer separated from Him. We've been brought together by the grace and love of Jesus Christ and His finished work in the cross. The cross bridges that gap between ourselves and God, and we now have peace with God, reconciled now and eternally. That's really good. That's absolutely crucial and significant and fundamental truth of God's Word. Jesus comes to bring His peace. But what He's saying here is, when we have peace with Him, when we have turned round, because repentance means that turning round, and we've turned round towards God and away from sin, then we're no longer going with the flow, and we're going against the tide. And that's when the struggle begins, and that's where division begins, because when we come to Christ, division starts in our own heart, because there's still remaining sin in our lives and in our heart. And so there becomes a battle daily and a division between God's will and my own sinful, selfish will, which brings tension into our lives.

It also brings trouble and tension with the direction we're facing and the world in which we live, a world that in many ways is rejected and has clearly rejected Christ and the Lordship of God through Jesus Christ. So if you become a Christian, there can be tensions. There can be family tensions as spoken of here in the section that we read. Or there can be tensions at work with ethics and morality or gossip or the way we want to speak. There can be tensions in a marriage where one partner becomes a Christian, where the different values and perspectives can become huge. Because when we come to Christ, the priority of our love changes, and Christ becomes first. And that's a hard thing to hear, and it's a hard thing for people who are not believers to accept. But it's what Christ wants for every human being, because He alone is worthy of that first place of worship and of obedience.

And what it should mean is that as we put Christ first and serve Him, our hearts are enlarged, they become bigger. Our capacity to love becomes more. It doesn't mean that we don't love our families anymore. It means we should love them more and have more capacity to love them. I think it's a much misunderstood verse. It's not that we love them any less.

It's we should be able to love them more because we have prioritized the love of Christ in our lives. And we are living as we are created to live, to love God and love one another.

And the family is hugely significant in that. It sounds much worse than actually it is if we unfold it and play it out. And many Christians have found, many new Christians have found as the initial resentment in their families or their work colleagues subsides, they begin to realize that as Christians, they're still the same person, but their capacity for forgiveness and love and service should grow and develop in their lives. But it can be tough to be a Christian to go against the flow and the temptation therefore, as it was in some cases with the disciples as we saw in the children's video, to compromise, to play dead, to give in, to choose a different kind of peace. There is peace. There is peace in turning away from

[13 : 21] Jesus. If you're a Christian and you feel cold and backslidden because you've searched, you've looked for another peace, and you found it because it's much easier. It's the peace of not being confronted with the truth of Jesus and the reality of His Lordship. It's the peace of the spiritual graveyard where there may be just shallow acceptance of Jesus' truth, but our heart is empty to His power and transforming grace. And that's a dangerous temptation and it's a destructive one, and it doesn't lead to wholeness and to joy.

But we do have to think about the reality of the toughness, which this chapter just talks about all the time. It's not a comfortable reading for it must, it couldn't have been for the disciples. But we recognize it's the truth of Scripture that is tough to choose Jesus Christ because we know every choice that we make in life has a consequence. You know, if I choose to support hypos, I can't support hearts. If you choose independence as a Scottish nationalist, you can't be a unionist. If you choose capitalism, you can't be a socialist. If you get a job at the BBC, you have to reject a job at Sky. If you choose to marry one person, it means you can't marry some other person. And there's an exclusivity therefore in that choice, and that's what Jesus is saying. In fact, there's quite a good illustration of the whole family dynamic one that seems so tough about, you know, putting

Jesus before your family and your father and your mother. But when somebody leaves home to get married, as the biblical picture there, if someone leaves his father and mother to be united to his wife, the two become one flesh, that's the same kind of image is that your priority, your first love, your focus has to change. It moves from your birth family to this new relationship in this new family where your wife or your husband becomes your priority love. It's not that you love your own family any less. Hopefully you can, you will still be able to love them more, but the priority of your love changes.

So I'm saying there will be trouble for you today if you're a Christian, because a giant is awoken. Satan and the spiritual forces of darkness will do everything to discourage you, to stop you praying, to stop you sharing the good news. And it might be lots of different things that he'll bring into your life to discourage you or to make it tough. It might be lockdown, it might be circumstances, it might be vague spiritual theories or religious half truths. It may be opposition, and Jesus is pointing out some of that here to the disciples.

It might be opposition from outside. It might be opposition from your own heart. We know the battles that Peter went on to have even though he'd been sent by Jesus and we know about Judas. So we want to be different, but we can't see the loveliness of Jesus maybe and we're battling selfishness and we don't, we still enjoy rebelling and we struggle.

[16 : 59] And it's tough. And you know how it is when you're trying, in different ways, when you're trying to lose weight or you're trying to get fit. You know what matters? You know it will be good to be fit and to be thinner, to lose weight, but it's so tough and it's so difficult. But there's a cost to be counted in that and also in the Christian life. So it's tough. Therefore, I ask the question, why not just give up? You say, well, it's so tough, why not just give up? And I just want to say two things more related to this chapter where the disciples are sent out in mission. We're not alone. Why don't we give up because we're not alone? The disciples here, they were sent out by Jesus. They had the Spirit of God in them in a kind of temporary way before the pouring out of the Spirit Pentecost. And they went out together. Jesus very wisely takes them and he sends them out two by two. They don't go out on their own. They go out in twos to do this great work.

Some of 12 sent out in twos. Jesus knows that we need the encouragement of company. And I mentioned that at the beginning about community. We need backup. We need to know that we're a sent people as a people together by Jesus. And I think that means it's very important to recognize that we are to seek brothers and sisters in arms who will go with us into the battle. The importance of having deep spiritual friendships, marriages, companionships, people who we share a sense of mission and calling with. I think that's the very foundation of evangelism, that sense of teamwork, that sense of not being alone with other Christians doing this work. And as a church we're doing this. And as city groups or as church plants, we're doing this as a people together. But also, of course, we've got the great truth in a unique way of Jesus being with us. And the great commission finishes with this call to the disciples to teach them to observe everything that I've commanded you. And behold,

I am with you always to the end of the age. He wasn't just with the initial disciples. He's not just with leaders of the church. He's with every believer till the end of the age until he returns. And we have that great reality of not being alone in this battle, in this testimony that we're to give to the world in our sharing of the good news. He empowers us. And we can do great things when we understand more and more of the greatness of Jesus towards us. We participate and partner in His harvest. We are His people. He is with us. So can I ask you today, or can I encourage you today, if you, whatever's happening in your life as a Christian, whatever battles you're facing, whatever struggles you're going through, can I remind you that He will never let go. He will never abandon you. He will never give up on you to the very end of your life or until he returns. You have some amazing company in your life. And though we're called to be on mission like the disciples, we know it's tough like it was for the disciples in a unique way. We're not alone like the disciples. And lastly, what I want to say is we can't be coerced to live as Christians and to do this work. The disciples weren't coerced into this. And it's very important to remember that there's a lot of tough truth in this passage. And I can only imagine what it might have been, must have been like for them, for Jesus to say what He said, yes, amazing things like healing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing lepers, casting out demons.

But He gave them very specific instructions that were also sharp and stripped back and difficult and tight. And there was going to be opposition and brutality, and people wouldn't understand them. But yet they went willingly, struggled, yes, battled, clearly, sometimes let them down, undoubtedly. But they knew even at this stage that the truth had set them free. Jesus was worth it. They had given up everything to follow Him. To whom shall we go? Peter said, you alone of the words, eternal life, as we said at the beginning, they believed in Him and they trusted in Him. Oh yeah, I know there was hiccups along the way to Pentecost and even beyond that. But they were after the resurrection and the ascension, they were transformed, they were enlivened, they were willing to lose their lives and by all accounts, all of them possibly apart from the Apostle John did lose their life in martyrdom. Now that has to be our motivation. Jesus has to be worth it. The battles, the struggles, the mission we're called on, it's because we're not alone, because we're redeemed and because He's worth it. We have come to know Him, not just about Him, but know Him as an amazing person and we know His truth. And His truth is what motivates us, His love,

His grace and His redemption on our behalf. Think of Ronaldo, Christiane Ronaldo or Usain Bol or Tyson Fury and the training they do, the incredible sacrifice they put into their support, their chosen support, because for them it's worth it. The wealth, the adulation, the self-value, the fame, whatever it might be, they regard it as worth it, even though we know for them as it is for everyone, that's a fading value. But we have a great motivation as Christians and we oughtn't to be coerced. We have the God of the universe who's touched our very small lives and He said, live. And He says, you're okay. He says, we're good, you're forgiven. I love you and the best is still to come. Tell others about me. You know peace and healing and meaning and forgiveness. And as we have grasped our need and our lostness, we have found rescue and we have found identity in Jesus Christ. As we've come before His holiness, we recognize that we have been set free. And so that changes our lives and changes our thinking from being, yeah, yeah, I've heard it, I know all about Jesus and yeah,

[24 : 41] I've heard another sermon about that to say, wow, He's worth it. We can't be coerced to live this life as Christians. It must come from that foundational knowledge of our own need and the great question or the great request we've made for Jesus to be a redeemer and to save us and to come into our hearts and the transformation that has meant for us and the answered prayers that we've seen. Because you see, if you're coerced in your Christian life or if you don't see Him as beautiful, as worthy of primacy, first place, not second, third, fourth, or dada dada, further down the line, first place, if He's not worthy, then either, can I suggest, because we've all experienced this at different times in our lives, we'll either be miserable and we'll treat Jesus like a stomach-churning medicine.

Our life will be full of guilt, law-abiding, and ugly struggle really, and it'll be painful. There'll be no easing, there'll be no joy, there'll be no laughter and love in our lives and no desire for others to have what we have. So we'll either be miserable or it will be superficial, so superficial that we don't want to ruffle any feathers and make any difference, and that's exactly what will happen. We'll make no difference in our own lives, our own hearts, or to anyone else spiritually. Superficial. Or I think we will give up and we'll give in to a compromised life and a divided heart. That's where the sword comes in. We recognize He, as we have a whole heart for Jesus, then that brings division in other areas, but if we have a divided heart, then everything just falls apart. So either Christ is the ultimate truth for us today, as He was for the disciples, or He's a fake. He can't just be a nice guy.

So what I'm saying from this very superficial, excuse me, look at this chapter, there's a cost to following Jesus. There's a calling that we are asked to follow and to respond to. Salvation and relationship with Jesus is free, but it isn't cheap. What price eternal life? I can't and you can't play around with it. It's far too important. And I've been reminded of that if you're doing this passage, and I hope you have been too, and I hope that if you want to talk more about it with me or with Thomas or with your pastoral team or your elders or anyone in the church, please pick up the phone or text us or speak to us.

We would love to speak to you more about Jesus. Amen. Let's pray. Father God, we ask and pray that you would help us to know and understand more clearly about you and who you are. We pray, Lord God, for your love and for your grace to work in our hearts.

And we pray that we would know, not just about you, but would know you in our hearts, that there would be no coercion, but there would be great love, great understanding of your presence with us, that you'll never leave us or forsake us or give up on us. And that that motivates us and helps us to persevere when it is tough and when we feel the weight of our calling. Lord, may you sustain and help us through it. And may people, as a result of hearing this message from your word, make that choice of following Jesus, knowing that it will enlarge their hearts and give them a love that they otherwise will never know, a love for God and a love for their neighbour. We ask it in Jesus' name, for his sake. Amen.