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INTERNATIONAL

TEACHING THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

Matthew - Lesson 10A

Chapter 10:1-4

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- Tonight we begin a two-chapter section in Matthew’s Gospel on how Jesus prepared His disciples for their ministries
 - As I explained last week, Jesus has been ministering in the Galilee for some time, drawing crowds with His teaching and miracles
 - And during that time, He openly declared that He is the Messiah
 - And He invited Israel to receive their Kingdom, if only they would receive Jesus as their King
 - But as Matthew said last week, the people were distressed and discouraged, like sheep without a shepherd
 - The religious leaders of Israel deceived the people, causing them to reject Jesus and His offer
 - We will learn about that climactic moment in Matthew 12, when that generation of Israel irrevocably rejected their Messiah
 - That moment will set Israel on a disastrous course, and it sets Jesus on a new direction in His ministry
 - But even now, as we enter Chapter 10, we find Jesus beginning to prepare His disciples for that coming change
 - In Chapters 10 and 11, Jesus will start that preparation process, but it continues even after Chapter 12 – all the way to the cross
 - In fact, Jesus will still be preparing His disciples, even after His resurrection, in the days leading up to His ascension
- So beginning today, we will study how Jesus took twelve untrained men and prepared them to assume leadership positions in the early Church
 - And Jesus’ job is incredibly difficult, because these men have no appreciation of what’s coming, nor did they sign up for the job
 - As you’ve read the Gospels in the past, you may have noticed how often Jesus’ disciples seemed clueless about what’s going on around them
 - And that’s because they started in their positions with no appreciation of what was coming
 - They didn’t realize that Jesus would be rejected, that the Kingdom would not be set up in their day
 - And they never anticipated that Jesus will die on a cross or that He must leave the earth for a time and wouldn’t return until thousands of years later
 - And even after Jesus died, they assumed His movement had completely failed
 - But most of all, these Jewish men could not possibly have appreciated how they would become leaders of an entirely new movement of God’s people
 - Of how they would shepherd a worldwide Church in Jesus’ name
 - And even more incredible, that new entity would be comprised primarily of Gentiles, instead of Jews
 - They had no appreciation for these plans, so it took them a while to understand what Jesus was trying to teach them
 - But in time, by the power of the Holy Spirit, it all began to make sense, and it

rocked their world

- So these guys have no idea where this story is taking them, but like Jesus, we do know where this story is going
 - So it's entertaining to watch how Jesus works with these men in preparing them
 - Russell Nelson once said that the decision to serve in a mission will shape the spiritual destiny of that missionary
 - And the *desire* to serve is a natural outcome of one's preparation
 - So if you want a spiritual legacy of serving Jesus, then you have to watch for how Jesus is at work preparing you for that service
 - Because Jesus does the hard work of preparing men and women to serve Him
 - He chooses His candidates, He gives us our marching orders, He designs our training curriculum and He approves us along each step
 - Of course, we have a role too, which is to engage with Jesus in the training process...to gain the value of each experience He offers
 - We have to acknowledge the calling He places on our life
 - We have to pay attention to His instructions, we have to follow His orders, and we have to persevere through the trials
 - Most of all, we have to make this process a priority over everything else in our life so that we win the prize, as Paul says
- In Matthew's narrative, we're going to see Jesus working these men through each of these stages of preparation
 - And we'll also watch the disciples responding in various ways (good and bad)
 - The story begins with the first step, Jesus choosing and commissioning His core group of leaders

Matt. 10:1 Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.

- As Matthew often does, he opens a new section with a summary statement
 - He says Jesus summoned His "twelve", and gave them authority to do miraculous things, and sent them out
 - This is Matthew's summary of what we will be hearing more about in the next couple of chapters
 - Before we dive in, notice that Matthew says Jesus focuses on "twelve"
 - This is the first time Matthew tells us that there was an "elite" group of twelve men taken from among all of Jesus' disciples
 - In fact, as we'll see later, Jesus established at least three levels of leadership among those who followed Him
 - First there were the disciples of Jesus, which included all who believed in Him as Messiah and followed Him – there were hundreds, if not thousands, who fit in that category

- Among His disciples, Jesus designated twelve men to become the leaders of the early Church
 - Later, Jesus will single out just three men from among the twelve for an even more intimate relationship with Him
- Among these divisions, Jesus assigns different levels of authority and responsibility
 - For example, all of Jesus' disciples received authority to declare the Kingdom and to minister in His name to the world
 - Then, the twelve received additional authority and responsibility to lead and teach the rest of the disciples in the Church
 - Finally, the three received even greater authority and responsibility to lead the twelve
- Speaking of groups, let's look at the first major division: the twelve

Matt. 10:2 Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother;

Matt. 10:3 Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus;

Matt. 10:4 Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him.

- Matthew lists these men briefly and then moves on to describe the power and authority they received from Jesus
 - We know more about some of these men than others, and it will be helpful to our future studies to get to know something about them, especially the top guys
 - Beginning with the simple observation that these men were chosen by Jesus
 - They didn't sign up or apply to be elevated in this way
 - In fact, Jesus never really asked them if they wanted to be chosen...He simply told them they were promoted
 - In Luke's Gospel, we learn that Jesus' selection of these men was preceded by an all-night prayer vigil
 - So Jesus appealed to the Father for clear direction on who should be selected for this special assignment
 - And in the end, the Father made a decision, which is how every calling in ministry works
 - We like to use the word "invite" a lot, but a more biblical word would be "commanded" or "burdened"
 - When God places a call on someone's life, it isn't an invitation, it's a command (and often a burden) we can't ignore
 - If we respond to God's call, we are obeying the Lord, not accepting His invitation
 - When we decline the calling of God, we are not exercising our options...we're sinning

- In Mark 3:14, we learn that as Jesus elevated these twelve men, He did so for two purposes
 - First, these twelve men were to accompany Jesus at all times
 - Although other disciples in the larger group could come and go at times, not these guys
 - The twelve would now be with Jesus at all times, everywhere Jesus went, until Jesus departed the earth
 - Jesus knew that His rejection was coming and that His time on earth was short, so He wanted to maximize His opportunity to prepare these guys
 - And more than maximizing the amount of time together, Jesus also wanted to maximize the quality of that time
 - Jesus didn't just spend time teaching these men, as He has done for the crowds, but Jesus also wanted to experience daily life with them
 - Because by experiencing life together, the twelve could internalize Jesus' priorities and sensibilities
 - They needed to see how Jesus lived, how He treated other people, how He prayed, how He gave thanks
 - How He responded to both the needy and to the haughty
 - That kind of intimate fellowship gave them far more insight into Jesus' character and approach to ministry than merely hearing Jesus' words
 - It's like the difference between reading the sheet music for Beethoven's Fifth Symphony vs. hearing the symphony performed
- So after the night of prayer, Jesus calls all His disciples together, and then in front of everyone, He selects the twelve men that Matthew lists
 - It's important to note that Jesus does this publicly
 - The larger community of His disciples are supposed to recognize that these men have been given special authority
 - Jesus has made these twelve leaders among equals
 - Which reminds us that every organization that desires to function effectively must have leadership
 - And the Church is no different...from the very beginnings of the Church, the Lord appointed leaders for the good of the whole
 - Those leaders ruled under the authority of Christ and they were appointed publicly, so that everyone would respect their role
 - But these men were leaders among equals, and that's also true today
 - Those who lead in the Church are not more holy, more worthy, more righteous
 - We aren't necessarily smarter or stronger, though we do tend to be better looking (joke)
 - Nor are we all-powerful or without accountability
 - Leaders are simply men and women called into service over God's flock and appointed to lead according to His will

- And of course, the Bible also has a lot to say to the leaders about how they should serve God’s people
- Leaders must serve in humility, demonstrating upright character and self-sacrifice, without lording over the people
- But likewise, we are called to respect our leaders’ authority and submit to their leadership as an act of obedience to Christ
- Just as the writer of Hebrews tells the Church

Heb. 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

- So Matthew says Jesus designated twelve men to shepherd the early Church, and Matthew’s list of names is one of four such lists in the Bible
 - The other three lists are found in Luke and Mark and Acts, and all four give the same 12 names, naturally
 - The order of the names varies slightly between the lists, but we always find certain things to be consistent across all four
 - The higher a name in the list, the more prominent or the more authority that individual had in the group
 - For example, Peter is always at the top of every list, while Judas Iscariot is always at the bottom of every list
 - But the second, third and fourth names in every list are always some combination of James, John and Andrew
 - These consistencies tell us that Jesus established a pecking order within His group of twelve that all Gospel writers recognized
 - Peter was the undisputed leader of the group, while Judas was the traitor and therefore, the least among them
 - After Peter, Jesus designated three men to serve as Peter’s key lieutenants over the Church
 - Jesus’ choice reflects a good leadership principle:
 - Leadership should always be divested among multiple leaders, serving at different levels
 - In his list, Matthew calls these twelve men Jesus’ apostles
 - This is the first use of the term “apostle” in Matthew’s gospel and it has an important meaning we need to understand
 - The word in Greek is *apostolos*, which comes from the Greek verb *apostello*, meaning “to send”
 - Therefore, we could define the term *apostle* as “one who is sent out”
 - So based on this new name, Jesus is indicating He’s going to send these twelve men out in a unique way
 - They are a select group, uniquely empowered and uniquely commissioned for

service in the early Church

- And not only these men...but later in Acts, and in the epistles, we learn that other men were also assigned the title of apostle
 - Paul, Barnabas, and James, the brother of Jesus, are also called apostles in Scripture, yet those men were not among the 12
- Nevertheless, all apostles received their office in the same way: they were personally selected and appointed by Jesus Himself
 - Obviously, we see that happening here, as Jesus appoints these twelve
 - But it also happened to Paul as described in Scripture
 - Acts tells us Jesus appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus and personally appointed him to be the apostle to the Gentiles
 - Paul also testifies in his letters that he was personally appointed to be an apostle by an appearing of Jesus
 - While we don't have the testimony of Barnabas or James, we know that Scripture declares they were apostles too
 - So perhaps Jesus met with these men at some point during His earthly ministry
 - Or perhaps Jesus appeared to them during the days He walked the earth following His resurrection
 - However it happened, the Bible is clear that the position of apostle cannot be assumed or assigned by anyone other than Jesus
 - After the first century, there are no more credible reports of Jesus appearing and appointing apostles
 - So, we conclude that apostles served an important and necessary role in the establishment of the early Church
 - But once that need was over, so was the need for men to fill that office
- The office of apostle came with unique abilities, powers that no one else in the Church possessed, as we'll see later in this study
 - But their powers weren't merely for show...the apostles were given miraculous powers to validate their claims to speak for the Lord
 - The apostles were the New Testament prophets
 - All Scripture in the New Testament was authored or sourced by apostles
 - Which is why the 27 books were chosen to join the canon of Scripture...they were the books known to be sourced from apostles
 - And that's why it was necessary for these men to have miraculous powers
 - Remember, that for many decades, the early Church had no written Scripture other than the Old Testament
 - During that early time, the Lord spoke to the Church through the apostles
 - But believers in this time needed some way to distinguish between true prophets and the false teachers
 - So the Lord equipped His true spokesmen, the true apostles, with miraculous

powers that could not be counterfeited

- In that way, when someone claimed to have the authority to speak on behalf of the Lord, the Church could test the person's claims
 - Since supernatural powers only come from God, anyone who demonstrated apostolic powers was showing God was on their side
 - But if that man could not perform the miracles commonly done by apostles, then his claims of authority were rejected
 - He was exposed to be a fraud and the Church was protected
- Paul gives us an example of this principle at work in one of his letters to the Corinthians

1 Cor. 4:18 Now some have become arrogant, as though I were not coming to you.

1 Cor. 4:19 But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant but their power.

1 Cor. 4:20 For the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power.

- In the Corinthian church, there were false teachers arrogantly claiming to have apostolic authority so they could mislead the people
 - These men were contradicting Paul's teaching and confusing the church, so Paul wrote to the church rebuking these fakes
 - Paul said words are cheap, but God's Kingdom came to earth with real power (referring to Jesus' miraculous power)
 - So just as Jesus backed His words up with power, so Paul would do the same, since he was a true apostle
 - And Paul said when he returned to Corinth, he would gladly see what power these so-called apostles had
- As Paul's situation illustrates, the Lord equipped the apostles with special powers so believers could recognize the true spokesmen of God
 - But once the Church was established and the canon of Scripture had closed, the need for apostles ended
 - So the Lord stopped appointing men to this position
 - When the last apostle, John, died sometime during the final decade of the first century, the age of apostles came to an end
 - It's no coincidence that John wrote the last book in the canon, and he wrote it chronologically as the last book to be written
- From that point onward, the Church went forward without apostles
 - But, we forevermore benefit from their inspired teaching, preserved in Scripture
 - And we continue to follow their leadership example
- So let's take a look at each of these men, beginning with Peter
 - Peter was the first leader of the Church, and he's also known for having three names from three different languages

- His given name in Hebrew was *Shimon*, or as we would say, Simon
 - In Jesus' day, Jews also commonly spoke Aramaic, which they brought back with them from captivity in Babylonian
 - So in Aramaic, Peter's name was *Keifa*, which we pronounce *Cephas*
 - Finally, Jesus calls Peter by the Greek name *Petros*, which we pronounce as "Peter"
- All three of these names have a meaning of "rock" or "stone"
 - Peter will be the leader of the apostles and the first leader of the Church
 - So in that sense, his name "rock" is prophetic of his position as a cornerstone of leadership for the early Church
 - Obviously, Jesus is THE cornerstone of the Church, and Peter's name wasn't intended to overshadow or compete with Jesus
- It simply indicated that Peter was appointed to lead the other apostles at the beginning, when leadership was most crucial
 - Remember, Peter was named at birth, which clearly reflects the sovereignty of God
 - The Lord marked Peter out to be the leader of the Church while he was still in diapers, and truly even before he was born
 - And then the Lord moved his parents to assign Peter the name, "rock"
 - And as we'll see in our study of Peter in the Gospel, I think the Lord was also indicating that Peter would be hard-headed
- Peter was persecuted by the Jews, along with James, and eventually fled Jerusalem for Antioch
 - According to Church tradition, he was later crucified by Nero in Rome
 - As you know, the Catholic religion has created its own myths concerning Peter
 - Namely, they claim Peter was the first ruler in a dynasty of omnipotent Church leaders called "popes"
 - The Catholics claim these men rule with authority directly from Jesus, because they succeeded Peter in his role as leader
- But Scripture never teaches that Jesus intended Peter's role as leader to be inherited or passed down to later men
 - On the contrary, once Peter disappears from the record of Scripture in Acts 15, nothing is said about any successor
 - Instead, the Church continues to operate under a plurality of local leaders operating more-or-less independently thereafter
 - We'll come back to the subject of Peter's authority in Chapter 16
- The second man in our list is Andrew, who was Peter's brother
 - John's Gospel tells us that Andrew introduced Peter to Jesus
 - In fact, Andrew has the distinction of being the very first man Jesus called to be His disciple
 - He came from Bethesda and operated a fishing business with Peter on the Sea

of Galilee

- At the time Jesus called him, he was living in Capernaum near a synagogue still standing today
 - Andrew is remembered for being the one to suggest a solution for the problem of feeding the five thousand
 - He noticed the young boy selling five loaves of bread and two fish
 - We don't know why Andrew thought that might be a workable solution, but it proved to be successful in the end
 - According to Church legend, Andrew is said to have travelled to Asia Minor and the Black Sea to evangelize that region
 - He traveled as far as Hungary or Russia and to the banks of the Oder in Poland
 - In Greece, he supposedly forced his way through a forest inhabited by wolves, bears and tigers
 - He died the death of a martyr, given the choice of being offered as a sacrifice to the gods or being scourged and crucified
 - By his own request, he was crucified on a diagonal cross because like his brother Peter, he felt unworthy to be crucified on the upright cross of Christ
 - Supposedly, his bones are buried in Scotland
- Third, we have James, the son of Zebedee and brother of the apostle John
 - James should not be confused with the second apostle named James, nor with Jesus' earthly brother, James, who wrote the letter in Scripture
 - His name in Hebrew is *Yaakov*, which is usually translated "Jacob", but can also be translated "James"
 - The Church chooses to refer to this apostle as "James" to avoid confusion with the Old Testament figure, Jacob
 - Along with Peter and John, James is among an inner circle of apostles that Jesus gave special attention and preparation for ministry
 - For example, James was included in the small group present with Jesus on the Mt. of Transfiguration
 - But, he was also one of the disciples who proposed calling fire down on the Samaritans, not one of his better moments
 - Notably, James is the first of the apostles to die as a martyr when Herod Agrippa kills him to please the Jews
 - In fact, James is the only apostle whose death is recorded in Scripture
 - The Armenian church claims that the place of James' death is located in their quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem, and his head is buried under an altar in a church located there
- Fourth, we have the apostle John, whose name means "Yahweh is gracious"
 - He was James' younger brother, the "sons of thunder", Jesus called them
 - This is the same John who wrote the fourth Gospel, the three epistles by his name, and the book of Revelation

- He too, was a fisherman and the youngest of all the apostles
 - He was the longest living apostle and the only apostle who, according to Church tradition, died naturally rather than as a martyr
- Little is known about the end of John's life
 - Second century Church writers claimed John was boiled alive in oil, but miraculously, was unharmed
 - He's said to be buried in Ephesus, which was the Church where he ministered after release from exile in Patmos
- The rest of the list is comprised of men who have little or no mention in Scripture, apart from their names appearing in the list of the twelve
 - Philip was the first to evangelize in Samaria, which took great courage for a Jew
 - Nathaniel, also called Bartholomew, was called by Jesus while under the fig tree
 - Thomas is famous for doubting that Jesus had resurrected
- Then we have Matthew, the author of this Gospel
 - The fact that Matthew places himself lower in the list is evidence to us that we can trust his record of events
 - Because if he invented this account, he would likely have placed his own name higher in the list to appear more important
 - But as it is, he places himself near the bottom of the list, reflecting that he was not among the top leaders of the twelve
 - Having said that, Matthew was one of only four apostles to produce a Gospel account of Jesus
- Finally, you have the second James in the list, called James the Lessor in Mark's Gospel, because the other James was a leader
 - This James is notable mainly because his mother, Mary, was one of the women who attended to the body of Jesus
 - Hippolytus, an early Church father, claimed that James was stoned at the temple, similar to James, the brother of Jesus
- So that's the list of twelve, which doesn't mean much to us yet, except perhaps for one observation...these were twelve ordinary guys
 - Fishermen, a tax collector, sons of ordinary Jewish homes
 - They had no formal training in religious matters
 - They were scoffed at by the religious elite, mocked by their own families
 - When it came to serving Jesus, they were usually naive, often confused about things Jesus said, unsure of what Jesus wanted
 - Occasionally, they were prone to rash ideas, prideful self-centeredness, and jealousy
 - In at least one case, they suggest Jesus murder innocent people in the name of God and religion, using fire from Heaven

- That's not what we would call an "all-star" team
- If this was a kickball team Jesus selected, we would say Jesus picked last... every time!
- To lead the worldwide Church of Christ, Jesus selected a group of below average, blue-collar Jewish boys to change the world
 - And that should be a great encouragement to all of us
 - Because when you consider what God accomplished through these ordinary men, you realize that He could use us too
 - The only thing holding us back from experiencing great things in service to Christ are our own doubts, fears and distractions
- As we move ahead into a study of how Jesus prepares these men, keep that in mind
 - These were nobodies that Jesus prepared to become the heroes of the faith
 - Yet they didn't even know that's what was happening, not at first
 - So perhaps ask yourself, what is the Lord preparing you for right now? Perhaps for something you don't even know is coming?
 - How will the Lord glorify Himself by using ordinary people like us to accomplish extraordinary things for His glory?
 - We only have to look around and join Him in what we see Him doing, and we'll have the answer to our question