

“According to Matthew”

A study of the Gospel of Matthew

Part 11: ‘The Disciples Charter’

In Chapter Ten we move into a new section in the gospel according to Matthew. Let us do a brief recap. Matthew’s concern is to present Christ as King and outline the way we should live as citizens of the His Kingdom.

- We have seen the strange circumstances of His origins.
- We have seen the strange nature of His Kingship – His self-emptying.
- We have heard His Kingdom manifesto in the Sermon on the Mount and seen case-studies of how that teaching was to be expressed.

Then in chapter eight through chapter ten came a section that dealt with the ‘exousia’, His authority. (An authority based upon the total freedom that ‘oozed’ out of His life).

That authority was demonstrated through;

- Healing sickness
- Stilling a storm
- Casting out demons
- Forgiving sins
- Bringing life to one who had died.

In the midst of all of this there has been a reoccurring theme that to be a disciple meant total commitment to the values of His Kingdom. We have also seen how the opposition to Jesus is increasing.

Up until now it has been Jesus teaching everything and doing everything. It has been His work and His authority. In Chapter Ten we see Jesus sharing the authority of His kingdom work with His disciples. But first He puts the team together.

^{NAS} Matthew 10:1 And having summoned His twelve disciples, He gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.

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; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax-gatherer; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus;

⁴ Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him. (Mat 10:1-4 NAS)

If we take a look at other Gospels, such as Luke, we notice different names than we have here. There are a number of lists of apostles. Some suggest that this can be explained simply by the fact that the disciples were known by more than one name. For example we know that Simon became Peter. The text tells us that much.

A more likely explanation is that there were actually more than twelve apostles, but Matthew is using the number ‘12’ in a figurative sense to show the continuity between the twelve tribes of the Old Testament and the twelve apostles of the New Community in Christ. Furthermore there

seems to be a conscious pairing up of the disciples, stressing the fact that He sent them out 'two-by-two' in their missionary endeavours. You will notice also that some of the most formative thinkers who shaped Christianity, in particular Saul who became known as Paul, are not amongst this list. Obviously that couldn't be so, as his encounter is with the Risen Christ, but nevertheless we know him as the 'Apostle' Paul and consider his experience as genuine as that of those listed here.

There is also the strange pairing at the end of the list of 'Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him'. One can only imagine the conversations that could take place between a revolutionary freedom fighter and the rather conservative and critical treasurer of the community coffers that Judas was to become.

All of which goes to stress that from its inception Christianity has brought together communities of people who were so radically different from one another that their only source of unity was their desire to be faithful followers of the Kingdom teaching He would offer to them. There was no earthly reason why tax-collectors, freedom-fighters, fishermen and philosophers would ever sit down together and decide they were being called to a mission to change the world. Only the authority (exousia) of Jesus could achieve such a strange thing.

No mention is made of the women in the community. But from the interaction Jesus had with Mary, Martha and many other unnamed females, women had a vital role to play in the mission of the church. At that time in history such was an unthinkable proposition. Indeed, in Scriptural events such as Jesus' encounter with a woman at a Samaritan well, there were potential seeds of scandal. Only later would Paul write to the churches (some of whom appeared to have been led by ladies in the faith) that in Christ there was no longer 'male or female.'

This first sending out of the disciples appears to be a training exercise for what would come after Jesus was no longer walking with them upon earth. Principles are laid down that they would later adopt as mission endeavors spread throughout the known world. For now though the confines of their work are laid out for them. They are to go to 'the lost sheep of Israel' Take a look at 5-7:-

⁵ **These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them, saying, "Do not go in *the way of the Gentiles*, and do not enter *any city of the Samaritans*; ⁶ but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷ "And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' (Mat 10:5-7 NAS)**

In all probability these first disciples had no experience of the world outside of Judaism. To reach the Samaritan and Gentile population would require skills that they did not possess. Such a task would fall to Paul, whose background was more cosmopolitan. It made sense for them to deal with people that they knew.

Maybe there is also a sense of 'damage limitation' in Jesus insisting that they go only to their own people. They would find amongst their own at least some friends and recognition. People had responded to John the Baptist and they would respond to them.

Their message is similar to that of John the Baptist. 'The Kingdom of heaven is 'near' or 'at hand.' They would demonstrate that nearness through seeking to do the same kind of actions they had witnessed Jesus doing. Healing. Teaching. Casting out evil. They are to do so with the

mandate that such signs were demonstrations not of their own personal ability, but of the authority (exousia) of Jesus Himself. This was the work of His Kingdom. They were the ambassadors.

The principles that are laid out for them from verses 8 through 40 have guided Christian missions, to a lesser and greater degree, ever since. They offer us an insight as to what radical discipleship of Jesus Christ may entail. Let us allow ourselves to be challenged by the qualities of discipleship that Matthew places before us; “The Disciples Charter”

1. *Disciples were to be dependant on God, not on their own wealth or possessions, for necessities (8—11)*

⁸ "Heal *the* sick, raise *the* dead, cleanse *the* lepers, cast out demons; freely you received, freely give. ⁹ "Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts, ¹⁰ or a bag for *your* journey, or even two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for the worker is worthy of his support. ¹¹ "And into whatever city or village you enter, inquire who is worthy in it; and abide there until you go away. (Mat 10:8-11 NAS)

Barclay stresses in his commentary that tasks such as raising the dead and cleansing lepers can be interpreted in a spiritual as well as a physical sense. To me, as one of those sent out into the world by the call of Christ that is encouraging. I seldom come across lepers and I believe it would be foolish to suggest to those who contact me for funeral services, “Do you mind if I try and raise them back to life before we make any arrangements?”

It is not that I don’t believe in the power of healing prayer or that there are situations of evil that people need delivering from, it’s just that the spiritual interpretation seems more true to ministry, as I have known it. Sickness is often a lot more than just physical symptoms and people can indeed be dead in their sins. Folk get themselves tied up in all sorts of situations that seem to pollute their minds or thoughts that they desire to be cleansed from and there are certainly folk who need help escaping from situations and addictions that have a hold on them as strong as any demon.

The mission of the church has always been one of healing, deliverance and putting things right. We often do that in a corporate rather than individual way. We feed the hungry by supporting local food pantries. We host programs for organizations such as A.A. We offer the Pilgrim State Dinner. Such things are the practical outcome of the original charter Jesus gave to the first disciples.

We don’t do so for financial gain. We freely give because we believe God freely gave His only Son, Jesus Christ, to die upon the Cross, that God may reconcile all things. We support those in full-time and part-time ministry because we believe enough in what God is doing in our midst to see the value of setting certain people free to devote significant amounts of their time to do the work of the Church.

We commission them to build the Kingdom, to let people know that if they seek to follow the way of Jesus Christ, it will open up to them new vistas of opportunity and blessing, and take their lives in wonderful, unexpected directions. We seek for people to encounter the Savior... using

that term in it's fullest sense of the word... to encounter the One who can heal, bring life in all it's fullness, and who offers forgiveness and cleansing, deliverance and new life.

As long as there is freedom of religion expression in this nation, then we have the opportunity to build churches as centers for mission and worship. I'm not convinced that our efforts are as welcome in the 21st century as they were in the 20th century. There was a day when town planners would include houses of worship as important for community life. Even the coal camps of West Virginia, in all their sparseness, included a store, a schoolhouse and a chapel. I suspect most town planners these days do not make religious centers a priority.

Such is probably the best contemporary interpretation we can apply to the injunction at the end of his section:—"Abide there until you go away." As both sociological and demographic forces make our situation somewhat precarious, we do well to do our best to preserve the advantages we have in terms of the freedom to practice our faith and carry out our mission as best as we are enabled! In many lands, and to increasing numbers in this land, the gospel is not welcomed. Such does not give us the excuse therefore not to proclaim it, and what becomes of those who reject our message is not a call we are asked to make.

Such seems to be the message lying behind our next passage: 12-15

2. *Disciples were to give all men the freedom to accept or reject them and their Lord (12-15)*

¹² "And as you enter the house, give it your greeting. ¹³ "And if the house is worthy, let your *greeting of peace* come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your *greeting of peace* return to you.

¹⁴ "And whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake off the dust of your feet. ¹⁵ "Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for *the land of Sodom and Gomorrah* in the day of judgment, than for that city. (Mat 10:12-15 NAS)

Though not practiced by ourselves the practices of offering 'greetings of peace' and of the 'shaking the dust from ones feet' were not unusual in their historical setting. A spoken greeting carried a certain authority with it. It was a request seeking reciprocation.

The closest analogy I can think of is of time past when door-to-door encyclopedia salesman were common. They would bring their wares. If you were favorable to the doorstep conversation you'd let them in and they would explain the benefits. At some point you would decide to purchase. And then they moved on... maybe to have the next door slammed in their face. Their greeting, in effect, would be returned to them. No sale!

The practice of shaking the dust off of the feet was one practiced by Jews such as the Pharisees whenever they had spent time in Samaritan or Gentile lands. They would shake their feet in order that every speck of polluting Gentile dust could no longer pollute their footsteps. It was a way of putting the past behind them.

Returning to the salesman image, how do you deal with slammed doors? What do you do when you get no sale? Walk away. Forget about it. And get busy on the next one. Don't worry about the negative. That's their loss.

Or in the case of this passage, don't worry about their judgment, because God has all that taken care of. **'Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city.'** Interestingly, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are here condemned not for their immorality (which has often been the traditional interpretation) but for their lack of hospitality and welcome.

The disciples had already seen that, despite the amazing things He was doing, particularly those who held the keys of religious power viewed the message of Jesus with great suspicion and hostility. The disciples should expect a similar response. Verses 16-25.

3. *Disciples were to expect and to endure persecution from those who rejected and hated their Lord. (16-25)*

¹⁶ "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; therefore be shrewd as serpents, and innocent as doves. ¹⁷ "But beware of men; for they will deliver you up to *the* courts, and scourge you in their synagogues; ¹⁸ and you shall even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. ¹⁹ "But when they deliver you up, do not become anxious about how or what you will speak; for it shall be given you in that hour what you are to speak. ²⁰ "For it is not you who speak, but *it is* the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. ²¹ "And brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father *his* child; and children will rise up against parents, and cause them to be put to death. ²² "And you will be hated by all on account of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved. ²³ "But whenever they persecute you in this city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you shall not finish *going through* the cities of Israel, until the Son of Man comes. ²⁴ "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. ²⁵ "It is enough for the disciple that he become as his teacher, and the slave as his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household! (Mat 10:16-25 NAS)

As a settled church community in a tolerant land we easily forget that not only are there areas of our world today where the church is persecuted, but the earliest church grew up in an age of great opposition. The advice of Jesus in the face of opposition is that we be 'shrewd as servants and innocent as doves'.

The idea of the 'serpent as wise' goes back to Genesis 3:1 where the serpent in the garden is pictured as being more 'crafty' (the Hebrew word 'Arum') than any other beast. 'Arum' can also be translated as shrewd or sensible. Matthew Henry alludes to Psalm 58:4 that speaks of the cobra who refuses to listen to the sorcerer's charms, and of how a snake will hide in the cleft of the rocks to protect its head. So, he infers, it is our duty to be wise so as not to bring down trouble on our heads, to be wise knowing when to keep silent in evil times and to be wise in not causing offence whenever we can help it.

The dove was considered a bird of peace. The dove holding an olive branch in its beak, was a sign to Noah that the terror of the flood was over. The psalmist cries 'Oh for the wings of a dove' that he may fly away and be at peace. Matthew has already told us that the Holy Spirit, pictured as a dove, descended upon Jesus at His baptism.

'Akerios' the Greek word commonly translated as innocent also has the meaning 'unmixed', which related to laws of purity and separation. Being as innocent as a dove meant focussing, as Paul suggested to the Philippian church, on that which was good and honest and true, rather than

having mixed motives. Though we are not a church daily persecuted for our faith the advice to pursue faithfulness and be whole-hearted in our commitment applies to all situations.

Matthew speaks of how persecution could come not only from outside forces of government and religion, but even from within the members of ones own family. But in every case they were to cultivate the awareness that the Holy Spirit would be with them, guiding them, being an advocate in their defense, inspiring them as to what they should say. And if things become impossible in one situation they should feel free to move on. **"But whenever they persecute you in this city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you shall not finish *going through* the cities of Israel, until the Son of Man comes."**

Most commentators see the phrase ‘until the son of man comes’ as a reference to the second coming of Christ that reflects the theology of the later church. But it can also be given an altogether less futuristic interpretation as meaning that Jesus was promising to always be there for them as they carry out their mission.

Such ties in with the teaching that follows, namely that they were to remember that this was Christ’s mission, they were the servants, not the guiding light. If you recall the Pharisees accusation in the last chapter that Jesus was doing the works of the devil Jesus amusingly turns that imagery into something to motivate the disciples. He points out that if they call the head of the house Beelzebul, then I guess it makes us all little devils!

This Kingdom message Jesus invites them to share is not of this world. They were ambassadors of God, doing work of great value. Such is the stress of our next passage verses 26-33.

4. *Disciples were to remember their great value to God the Father, and do His will without fear of men. (26—33)*

²⁶ **"Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. ²⁷ "What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear *whispered* in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops. ²⁸ "And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹ "Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰ "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ "Therefore do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows. ³² "Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. ³³ "But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven. (Mat 10:26-33 NAS)**

A follicly challenged minister colleague told me that Matthew 10:30 was his least favorite in the whole bible. I see his point. What meaning does ‘Every hair on your head is counted’ have to a bald man? Thankfully there are still the sparrows! Or in these parts maybe we would prefer to use seagulls or geese as our illustration of God’s provision. Whatever our image the point is that God takes care of creation and therefore God will take care of God’s servants.

They are not to be afraid. God will bring all things to light, both the false motives of their opponents and their right motives and deeds of faith. As long as they keep on keeping on, all things will reach their eternal end, be it a glorious or hellish destination.

They are not to fear. But neither are they to expect that this whole mission is going to be a

breeze. The message of Jesus would bring division and separation. And often the place that would be felt most acutely was within the immediate family. So verses 34-39.

5. *Disciples were to expect conflict, even in their own homes. In everything Jesus is to be put first, and pain is to be borne just as Jesus bore the pain of His cross. (34—39)*

³⁴ "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ "For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; ³⁶ and a man's enemies will be the members of his household. ³⁷ "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. ³⁸ "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. ³⁹ "He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it. (Mat 10:34-39 NAS)

The words in this section have to be interpreted against the background of what has come before them. Jesus is seeking the kind of total commitment from His disciples that He knew was the only thing that could carry them through. Let me provide an Adrian paraphrase of what I sense is the thrust of this passage.

“Look, when you agreed to follow me, did you think it was all going to be plain sailing? Did you think I could do a few miracles and everybody would love us and the glory of God would just materialize in our midst like a cloud? That’s not the way it works. The Good News will be seen as bad news. It will divide some, rather than bring them together. Peace never comes without struggle. And very up close and personal.

So be sure of your love for me! I have to be first... or your loyalties will be divided. I’m headed for death upon a Cross... are you sure you want to follow? To find your true self you are going to have to lose yourself in this mission! But at the end of it all... you will find life like you never imagined possible!

Lest you consider my own paraphrase be too fanciful consider Eugene Petersen’s transliteration in the Message Bible.

"Don't think I've come to make life cozy. I've come to cut—make a sharp knife-cut between son and father, daughter and mother, bride and mother-in-law—cut through these cozy domestic arrangements and free you for God. Well-meaning family members can be your worst enemies. If you prefer father or mother over me, you don't deserve me. If you prefer son or daughter over me, you don't deserve me. "If you don't go all the way with me, through thick and thin, you don't deserve me. If your first concern is to look after yourself, you'll never find yourself. But if you forget about yourself and look to me, you'll find both yourself and me."(Matthew 10:34-39 - The Message)

Whilst disciples should not be along for the journey just because there was a prize at the end of it, at the same time, they should realize that faithfulness would bring great blessings both to themselves and those they ministered to. Our final section 40-42.

6. *Disciples could know they brought great gifts to men, who would be rewarded for their responses to the Father and His children. (40—42)*

⁴⁰ "He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. ⁴¹ "He

who receives a prophet in *the* name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.

⁴² "And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you he shall not lose his reward." (Mat 10:40-42 NAS)

So our passage concludes on an entirely different note. After beginning with talk of raising the dead and casting out demons, suddenly we are taken down from such lofty heights. Jesus speaks no longer of the people as being wolves, but 'little ones'. The mission is phrased as '**Whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you he shall not lose his reward.**'

It is almost as though Matthew senses that his readers must be thinking, 'No way can I make that kind of commitment. This is too much to take!' So again we are reminded that true religion is as much about the little things as the big things. Little loving actions, like offering a child a drink of cool water when they are thirsty, are significant acts in the Kingdom of God. The smallest kindness can be a window through which God's love can shine.

In chapter 11 we'll meet some disciples of John the Baptist and learn what has become of him since those days down at the riverside. We'll also receive some more wonderful pictures of discipleship. But for now let us recall the '**Disciple's Charter.**'

"I am sending you out like sheep among wolves"

1. Disciples were to be dependant on God, not on their own wealth or possessions, for necessities (8—11)
2. Disciples were to give all men the freedom to accept or reject them and their Lord (12-15)
3. Disciples were to expect and to endure persecution from those who rejected and hated their Lord. (16-25)
4. Disciples were to remember their great value to God the Father, and do God's will without fear of people. (26—33)
5. Disciples were to expect conflict, even in their own homes. In everything Jesus is to be put first, and pain is to be borne just as Jesus bore the pain of His cross. (34—39)
6. Disciples could know they brought great gifts to people, and would be rewarded for their responses to the Father and His children. (40—42)

"Anyone who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me."