

Sent by the King

Date: 22 February 2026, 1st Sunday in Lent

Location: St George's, Battery Point

Series: Matthew - Following the King

Texts: Matthew 9:35-10:42

One of my personal goals in ministry is to help people be public Christians. It's one of the things I've learned a lot about being here at St George's because our building is so prominent in the city. It's what Jesus talks about when he says, "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house."¹ We're not meant to be hidden as Christians. We're meant to shine the light of Christ wherever we go. And, the reality is, that we're on display as Christians. Whether we like it or not, people are watching us. What we say and do reflects back upon Jesus, our Saviour and King, so we may as well get on with doing a good job!

Our text today is Matthew 10. In this speech Jesus does two things: He sends his disciples out to share in his own mission; and he prepares them for the reception they will receive, welcome or rejection. We'll look at those two points. Jesus' words are incredibly helpful in preparing us to be the public disciples he calls us to be.

In this text Jesus speaks to his disciples. You may be here and not sure where you stand with God, or maybe you know you're not a Christian. As you listen in over our shoulders, as it were, the question for you is, how will you respond to Jesus and his disciples? And there are some great words of promise for you here.

Let's dive in.

Sent by the King 9.35-10.15

In 9.35 we get a summary of Jesus' mission.

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and illness.

Through his work of preaching and healing, the kingdom of God is breaking in to the world.

¹ Matthew 5.14-15

In verse 36 we see Jesus' motivation for his mission.

36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

The shepherd in ancient Israel was a picture of leadership. The prophets critiqued Israel's leaders for failing, even fleecing the sheep placed under their care. I have to say, when I look at the crowds, it's the same today. People look for shepherds be they politicians or influencers or gurus or YouTube psychologists but they are still harassed and helpless. Maybe that's how you feel. Jesus is still the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. My prayer is that my heart for the world, and your heart for the world be one of compassion, just like Jesus.

Jesus continues.

37 Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. **38** Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'

The situation is still the same today. In Australia about 21% of people attend church at least monthly.² That's nearly 80% of Australians who rarely if ever come through our doors. It's only one metric, but that's a vast number of Australians who need the Good Shepherd.

But there is a problem. There are too few workers to reap the harvest. Jesus' solution: Ask the Lord of the harvest to send workers. Jesus answers his own prayer by sending out the disciples. In 10.1 we read that Jesus gave the twelve authority to drive out unclean spirits and to heal sickness. Jesus has shown his authority to do this and now he shares his authority with his disciples. Then in verse 5 he sends them out to do just what he had been doing. In verses 7-8 we read,

As you go, proclaim this message: "The kingdom of heaven has come near." **8** Heal those who are ill, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.

The disciples share in his mission. They have received God's free gift of life through Jesus, now they share that with others.

Matthew draws our attention to the twelve, calling them apostles and listing them by name. Jesus sends them to "the lost sheep of Israel", and not the Gentiles or Samaritans. Does this mean that his kingdom is only for Israel? Here we find a double context in view. There is the

² <https://www.ncls.org.au/articles/australians-attending-church/>

immediate context of Jesus' day. The twelve go to the Israel of old, but they also represent the new Israel, God's people now, the Church. We live after Jesus' resurrection and his final words in Matthew's Gospel to go and make disciples of all nations. So Jesus' words of sending the twelve are also directed to the Church.

The Church is sent into the world to share in Jesus' mission of proclaiming the kingdom and healing the sick. Through the Holy Spirit he has given his power and authority to his people to carry on his mission. To proclaim his kingdom is to proclaim Jesus as King. We all participate in this as his disciples, members of his body the Church. We're all given different gifts with which to serve. Some may do the preaching, others may be involved in healing, others in prayer, others in serving, the list goes on, but each one of us is called to serve in the Church for the kingdom. And as his disciples we are sent into the world. We're on display. We're public.

So what does it look like to be sent into the world?

First, it's about *Trusting God will Provide*.

9 'Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts – 10 no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep.

We find this incredible in an industrialised modern city, but it was basically the story of how my Ugandan next door neighbour at theological college began his ministry. One commentator insightfully writes that even in a Western context, a church preoccupied with money will lack credibility in its mission. Even with budgets and planning, we still ultimately trust that God will provide the resources we need to pay our bills and do the mission he has called us to here at St George's as the Light on the Hill.

Second, in verses 11-15, Jesus tells us there are two responses we can expect as he sends us out into the world. People can either **welcome or reject** us. Jesus uses a very concrete picture of that welcome or rejection.

11 Whatever town or village you enter, search there for some worthy person and stay at their house until you leave. 12 As you enter the home, give it your greeting. 13 If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you.

What is the "worthy" person, or the "deserving" home? Basically it is someone who is open, who receives you and is willing to listen to the message. This concrete setting reminds us of the hospitality of Abraham who in Genesis 18 welcomed the three strangers, and in doing so welcomed God himself. And so in verse 40 Jesus says,

'Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.

To welcome someone sent with the good news of God's kingdom is to welcome the one who sent them, the king, Jesus. And this in turn is to welcome the God who so loved the world that he sent his Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. If you're not a Christian, do hear that promise. Your welcome response is a welcome to God himself. Jesus says he is knocking at the door of your heart and wants to come in and bring his life and peace. Will you welcome him?

But this is not the only response we can expect as we carry Christ's light in the world. We can also expect rejection.

14 If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet. **15** Truly I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.

Now just because we can expect rejection as followers of Christ doesn't mean we have a license to be jerks. Jesus has already said, "Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you."³ Rather, it is that, no matter how winsome our conduct, no matter how gracious our speech about Jesus, some will reject us, because they are rejecting him. In fact how people treat us as Christians is a good indication of their attitude towards God.

None of us likes to be rejected. It hurts. And so in verses 16-39 Jesus teaches us how to deal with that rejection when it comes. But before we turn to point 2, notice how Jesus finishes this section. Sodom and Gomorrah were famously towns that God destroyed because they rejected and sought to abuse his angels. Jesus says there is a coming day of judgement. And to reject him will be to find yourself on the wrong side on that day. The question for all of us is will we welcome him as king now, and so receive the freedom and healing he brings?

Rejected by the World - 10:16-39

So how do we face those who reject us as servants of Christ?

Jesus acknowledges our vulnerability, verse 16.

I am sending you out like sheep among wolves.

There will be people hostile and aggressively opposed to Christ. But how are we to respond?

³ Luke 6.27-28; cf. Matthew 5.44

Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.
We're to be wise and prudent, and at the same time to be people of goodness and purity, to not compromise our integrity.

Jesus continues:

17 Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. **18** On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles.

We see this play out in the New Testament with the first disciples. But Christians throughout the ages have faced this kind of persecution. When I was at uni I visited Pakistan with a friend who had grown up there as a missionary kid. We visited his old school that had been closed after it was attacked by Islamic extremists who killed 6 people. You can talk to people in our own church family about the kind of pressure they experienced in their own country for being Christians. We are unlikely to face that kind of persecution here in Australia, but we can face social pressure to conform to the ethics of our neighbours or to remain silent about our faith.

One of the most painful things that Jesus says that can happen is that following him can lead to rupture in the family. He puts it in stark terms, verse 31.

21 'Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. **22** You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

Or just as strongly in verse 34:

34 'Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. **35** For I have come to turn
"a man against his father,
a daughter against her mother,
a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law –
36 a man's enemies will be the members of his own household."

It's not that Jesus wants to drive families apart, rather he wants our highest loyalty. He explains in verse 37.

37 'Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

Again the violence Jesus speaks of here is far from our experience in Australia, but it is a reality in other parts of the world when people come to Christ their life can come under threat from

their family. Here it may be more of an added challenge in the family dynamic. But it's a confronting call from Jesus. Will he come first in our lives, even before our family?

This is the way of the cross that Jesus' calls us to, in verse 38.

38 Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. **39** Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

To be a disciple of Jesus means to follow him, to walk in the way of the cross, and that means losing our lives for his sake. We've seen some of the concrete examples Jesus gives of what that looks like. But his promise is that this is in fact the path to real life. As the German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was executed by the Nazi's put it, "the only path to the resurrection, is the cross."

To step out as a public disciple and face rejection and hostility can be a fearful thing. But Jesus says 3 times, "**Do not be afraid**", with three reasons in verses 26-31.

26 'So do not be afraid of them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.

Here Jesus is speaking about the promise of the day of judgement. This is good news because that day will be a day of vindication for all those who have stood for the name of Christ. Those moments where you resist the pressure and stay faithful to Christ that nobody sees, God knows. Likewise, where in this life there is so often no justice for those who suffer for Christ's sake, on that day what has been done in secret will be exposed and judged.

Second, Jesus says, verse 28,

28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Again Jesus has our eternal destiny in mind. It is only God who can destroy both body and soul. Jesus has already warned about the coming day of judgement. The fear he speaks of here is a healthy one which drives us to turn to God for the mercy and forgiveness he offers us in Jesus, and his promise of seeing God face to face, life eternal in the new creation. This hope is what has given so many of our sisters and brothers tremendous courage in the face of those who would kill their bodies. It's why we say in the creed each week that we believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.

Jesus' goes on, verse 29,

29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. **30** And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. **31** So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

God knows us intimately. Nothing happens outside his care. And he cares for us.

Jesus' heart of this world is one of compassion. He sends us out into the world as his disciples, sharing in his mission of proclaiming his kingdom in word and deed. There will be some who welcome the good news and welcome us. We rejoice as they find life in Jesus' name. Others will reject us because they reject the master we serve. But even if we experience the rejection of people, we know that in Jesus we live in the radiance of the smile of our Father in heaven, who loves and cares for us.