

CFM11 – Matt. 10-12, Mark 2, Luke 7, 11 - “These twelve Jesus sent forth”

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While we will be focusing primarily on Matthew’s account today, Mark’s account preserves an interesting detail worth nothing. Jesus selects the apostles before the commission appearing in Matt. 10, as follows:

Mark 3:13 And he goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto him whom he would: and they came unto him. 14 And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, 15 And to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils:

This is different from the commission appearing in Matt. 10, which Mark recounts in 6:7-13, as follows:

Mark 6:7 And he called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two; and gave them power over unclean spirits; 8 And commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse: 9 But be shod with sandals; and not put on two coats. 10 And he said unto them, In what place soever ye enter into an house, there abide till ye depart from that place. 11 And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city. 12 And they went out, and preached that men should repent. 13 And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them.

The symbolism of going up into the mountain is obvious, Jesus went to commune with his Father. But, Mark’s account suggest the original ordination occurs there as well. That Jesus didn’t ordain them at the Temple is poignant, given that Temple operated under the Levitical Priesthood. Jesus takes them into a mountain to ordain them to the Melchizedek Priesthood.

Summary Points of Apostle's Instructions

Authority given (Matt. 10:1) – at least set apart in the calling, maybe additional priesthood keys given over and above what is given in Mark 3:13.

Preach to natural Israel only (Matt. 10:5-7, rescinded in Acts 10) – fulfil covenant with Abraham, et al., until Jesus is resurrected and crucified, then the promise is fulfilled and the ministry is extended to all nations.

No purse or scrip (Matt. 10:8-15) – no priestcraft. A “scrip” is a traveler’s or pilgrim’s bag, from the Latin “scrippum”.

Sheep in the midst of wolves (Matt. 10:16-23) – be careful and nice, even when people aren’t.

Disciple not above master (Matt. 10:24-33) – if they revile me, they will revile you.

Not peace, a sword (Matt. 10:34-39) – preaching the truth causes the wicked to rebel, quoting Micah 7:6, invoking context of Micah 7:1-7, not literal, figurative.

Whoever received you receives me (Matt. 10:40-42) – they represent him, don’t take it personally when you get rejected, it isn’t you.

Example of John Baptist, in Light of Apostle's Instructions

Points made:

John was the predicted forerunner. No greater prophet.

People looking to for an excuse to reject the prophets will find one no matter what, even contradicting themselves (11:16-19). This is not a matter of being rational, it is a matter of sophistry (also cp. Mark 2:14-28, Luke 11:14-26).

Theological purpose:

The apostles are warned they will face adversity in their mission. Here is an example of the kind of adversity they will face: John Baptist. Even though he is a great prophet, that doesn't mean he is protected from or above suffering in the ministry. The apostles can expect similar reactions from people, and similar fates.

Even some of John Baptist's disciples reject Jesus, despite John Baptist's own testimony, and the miracles they witness (cf. Matt. 11:6). This is the warning to the apostles.

Side notes:

Aside from the Matthew account connecting the apostolic commission with John Baptist, Mark and Luke also do so in a slightly different way (cf. Mark 6:14-29, Luke 9:7-9).

Scholarly commentary on Matt. 11:3 is split over whether John is sending his disciples to Jesus, or whether John is whining for delivery from the Messiah. Given content of John 1 and John 3:25-36, I find it impossible to read it as whining, it has to be John referring his disciples to Jesus, as he had done before, particularly given the comment Jesus makes in 11:6 about them rejecting him.

On Matt. 11:11 "notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he", I take this to follow the "But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant" (Matt. 23:11). Jesus' praise of John Baptist is exceptional, but, he still qualifies it to let the apostles know that this high praise doesn't make him anything more than a man with respect to the kingdom of Heaven. He doesn't want the apostles to think that being like John Baptist earns you a special position in the kingdom of Heaven.

Theological Purpose of the Apostolic Commission

Whenever something is happening in the Scriptures, we should always ask ourselves what the theological purpose is. What is Jesus doing, and why? In a lot of cases, it is obvious. Here it is less clear.

In D&C 84:63-91 the Lord recounts a good deal of what is said in Matt. 10. But, some of His statements there are a bit different. One in particular is verse 64:

D&C 84:64 Therefore, as I said unto mine apostles I say unto you again, that every soul who believeth on your words, and is baptized by water for the remission of sins, shall receive the Holy Ghost.

At no point in Matt. 10 does Jesus say anything about this. He doesn't say anything like this until Matt. 28:16-20, which states:

Matt. 28:16 Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. 17 And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. 19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

D&C 84 unifies these two different historical Apostolic commission events, which likely happened ~2 years apart, into a single theological purpose.

That purpose was to prepare the original apostles to take over the ministry from Jesus after his crucifixion. Jesus was planning this from the beginning, and wanted the apostles ready to assume the leadership of the Church. He started early in his ministry getting them ready, so they would have experiences over those ~2 years to be ready for the second commission.

Also, consider the themes of John 13-17, the discussion at the Last Supper. A lot of them are similar to what is talked about in Matt. 10 (e.g., service in the Church, unity with Jesus and the Father). One thing is glaringly different, namely the discussion of the role of the Holy Spirit in the ministry. Why? Because with the new dispensation occurring in Acts 10, the Holy Spirit is poured out more freely to assist the Apostles in ministering to all nations, not just Israel.

As Jesus has fulfilled the promises to Abraham, He can now stand as intercessor before the Father and ask Him to send the Spirit to reclaim all of the nations, and send the Spirit to do that. Formerly, Jesus couldn't do that, hence his reluctance to minister to Gentiles, unless the exhibited extraordinary faith.