

Matthew 10C

- We're in Chapter 10 and we're learning how Jesus wants His disciples to serve Him in the Kingdom Program
 - Jesus has begun preparing His twelve apostles to assume responsibility for leading the church following His departure
 - Those 12 men and the other apostles who joined them later didn't realize the magnitude of the mission they would inherit
 - They had no experience, and they had never trained for something like this
 - But in a few short years, the reality will hit them...and as it does, they'll fall back on this training and the leading of the Spirit
 - For us, it's fun to be a fly on the wall watching how they learned, especially when we remember they eventually became our examples
 - When you read Peter, Paul, John or even this Gospel, you're learning from the same men who are getting their training wheels here
 - It's reassuring to know that everyone begins their walk with Jesus in a similar fashion... ignorant and needing basic instruction
 - But by the grace of God, we grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ
 - So let's return to studying how Jesus equipped these men to serve Him as ambassadors of the Kingdom Program
 - You remember I explained last week that in the Bible the concept of the Kingdom develops through four stages
 - The first time we hear about a Kingdom is in the story of Abraham, when God made a promise to him in a covenant
 - The Lord promised an inheritance for Abraham and his descendants in a Kingdom to come in the future
 - Over centuries, the Kingdom remained a promise to be fulfilled when the Messiah came to Israel

- When Jesus did come to Israel, He preached that the Kingdom was at hand, meaning God was prepared to fulfill His promise
- In that moment, the promise of the Kingdom became a proposal to Israel
- But as we will see in Chapter 12, Israel ultimately rejected that proposal and refused to accept Jesus as their King
 - Since the proposal of the Kingdom was rejected, the concept of Kingdom changed again, from proposal to program
 - The Lord began preparing His disciples to serve Him in a program of recruiting people to become citizens of the Kingdom
 - In a future day, when the Kingdom comes to Earth, those citizens will be ready to walk into the Kingdom
- So the Kingdom concept in the Bible is a four part story:
 - Promise → Proposal → Program → Place
 - Today, we are still in the third stage of the Kingdom, the program of recruiting citizens for the future Kingdom
 - We have the same mission the apostles received, and therefore we have need for the same training they received
 - We are supposed to recruit and train citizens for their life in the future Kingdom
 - Today, we call it evangelizing and discipling believers – but it's the same thing
 - Last week I gave you an outline for how Jesus approaches His training in Chapter 10, and we will use this outline as we study through the chapter
 - The Objective - vs.5-6
 - The Message - v.7
 - The Method - vs.8-12
 - The Result - vs.13-15
 - The Mindset - vs.16
 - The Cost - vs.17-31

- Last week we studied the first part, the Objective of the Kingdom program
 - And as we learned, the Kingdom program objective is to find lost sheep
 - We're supposed to go out on a rescue mission, seeking hearts that God has prepared to receive the Gospel
 - We can't *make* someone accept Jesus...coming to faith in Jesus requires a person be born again spiritually
 - And only the Spirit of God can grant new spiritual life
- So knowing this, we approach our mission like an Easter egg hunt
 - We search for the person who the Spirit has already prepared to receive our message, and as we find them, we collect them
 - Like a shepherd picking up a lost sheep and bringing it back to the pen
- So let's turn to the second part...the message we are called to bring to that lost sheep

Matt. 10:7 "And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'

- We can divide the Kingdom message into three components
 - There is the *circumstance* of the message
 - The *calling* of the message
 - And the *content* of the message
- First, Jesus explains the circumstances of our message: as you go
 - Notice what Jesus didn't say...
 - He didn't say *should* you go, or *if* you go, or when the mood strikes you to go...He says *as* you go
 - In other words, the Kingdom program expects that we are sharing the message constantly, everywhere to whomever we meet
- Jesus didn't tell His apostles which towns to enter or which road to take

- Because it didn't matter...there were lost sheep everywhere
- As these men went along their way they would encounter people, and it's in those everyday moments that the Church accomplishes its mission
- I like to say that ministry is what we do while we're waiting for our next mission trip
 - That's my way of saying the Kingdom message isn't reserved just for special moments like a missions trip
 - And it's not intended just for certain people living in dark jungles or under bridges
 - It includes all people everywhere: the soccer mom standing next to you at practice
 - The cubicle mate at the office, the person sitting next to you on the plane, your neighbor
 - Furthermore, the Kingdom program doesn't keep office hours
 - There aren't certain times and places that we're "on duty" for Jesus
 - We don't just share Jesus on Sundays or at the soup kitchen
 - Our life mission is to share the news of the King and His coming Kingdom in every moment of our daily life...as we go
 - We are ambassadors for Christ, and we are supposed to be bold in sharing the Gospel with virtually anyone we meet
 - Jesus says "as you go" to remind us that the whole point of living in this world is to share the Gospel with that world
- Perhaps you're thinking, "Well, I know that's true, but it's hard for me to share the Gospel. I'm shy and afraid of rejection." (Toby)
 - Perhaps you are shy, but I bet there are some topics you willingly and boldly share with strangers
 - I've met Christians who are quicker to share a new herbal remedy or some business opportunity with a stranger than the Gospel
 - Why? Because we believe what we know will help someone else

- It's that desire to want to help the other person that motivates us to press into their world a little and share our perspective
- So why do we hesitate to share the Kingdom message as we go?
 - I think it's because we've lost sight of the objective...we're called to find lost sheep, not turn goats into sheep
 - Jesus does the saving, we don't, so we need not worry about the outcome
 - You know not everyone will want your herbal remedy or to invest in your business, and likewise we know not everyone will agree with the Gospel
- But here's the thing...you don't know who the lost sheep are before you talk to them
 - You can't see lost sheep coming...
 - It's not like they have halos over their head and a name tag that says, "Hello, I'm Steve, baaaaah"
 - So if we are going to find them, we have to be willing to share the good news *as we go* with everyone!
 - It's the Easter egg hunt analogy all over again
 - In an Easter egg hunt, kids go through the yard looking for eggs as they go *because* they know there are eggs already there
- Imagine if a child sat on the porch scanning the yard trying to guess where the eggs were before he or she even began searching
 - They probably wouldn't find many...if fact, what if that child said I'm afraid of failure, so I can't bear the thought of even looking?
 - How many eggs would they likely find that way?
 - The very reason kids search with such eagerness is because they know persistence at the task will bring a reward
- We should think more like a kid...the sheep are out there and the more places we look, the more we will find
 - And if you're worried about embarrassment when your conversations go poorly, then just remember who is responsible for the outcome

- Declare the good news in the everyday circumstances of life, and leave the results to the Lord
- So Jesus says the circumstances of the Kingdom program message are “as we go”, which leads to the second element of the message: our message’s calling
 - Notice Jesus says we are to “preach” our message
 - Most of us don’t think of ourselves as preachers because we don’t stand behind a pulpit
 - And as a result, we might assume Jesus is only calling pastors or evangelists to deliver the Kingdom program message
 - And if so, then you probably assume your job is to bring unbelievers to church so the pastor can save that person
 - But that’s not what Jesus meant when He said preach to His Church
 - The word preach in Greek could also be translated “to proclaim”, and it doesn’t refer to a certain activity at a church service
 - Preaching is proclaiming truth in direct manner that calls upon the audience to agree and take action
 - It’s a style of speaking that can be done before a crowd in a public setting – or to a single person in a private moment
 - And you may not realize it, but you probably preach to people from time to time
 - When you advocate for a particular political view around the dinner table, you’re preaching
 - When you extoll the virtues of a new diet to your best friend, you’re preaching
 - When you champion a social cause on social media, you’re preaching
 - In each case, you’re stating a truth (as you see it) in a direct fashion hoping to win agreement and call someone into action
 - I would add that *good* preaching is accompanied by a degree of passion and personal investment in the outcome
 - You’re not dispassionately sharing information in an academic fashion

- A good preacher cares about his or her topic and they believe that it's in the audience's best interests to agree
- We need to take note that Jesus chose the word "preach" rather than any of the other terms that the modern church has adopted instead
 - Preaching is out of favor these days, and instead our politically-correct culture prefers tolerance over passion and absolutism
 - We're told we shouldn't intrude into others' blissful ignorance
 - The world believes everyone has the right to hold to whatever "truth" they prefer and we must affirm them in their thinking
 - Which has led some in the Church to move away from preaching the truth and toward more subtle ways of sharing the Gospel
 - We try to make the Kingdom message more inclusive, palatable, and non-threatening
 - We soften the call to repentance, trying not to push too hard for agreement, hoping we won't alienate the person in the process
 - It's like we want to sneak up on them with the Gospel
 - But Jesus didn't say *offer* the Gospel or *discuss* the Gospel or *share* the Gospel or *invite* someone to come to church
 - He said *preach* the Gospel because He knew you can't sneak up on someone with the Gospel
 - Sooner or later – if you're going to give them the full truth – that truth will offend the person
 - Sooner or later, a person will realize that you're saying they are not OK with God
 - That they stand condemned before God because of their sin
 - And then you tell them that God has made a way for their sin to be forgiven if they receive the truth
 - There simply is no "polite" way to share that truth...you have to preach that truth – proclaim it – if it's going to be heard
 - Peter said it this way:

2Pet. 1:16 For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

2Pet. 1:19 So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.

- Peter said his job wasn't to devise a clever tale, to make the story of Jesus fun and whimsical
 - This isn't a sales job...we are making known the power and glory of the coming of Jesus Christ to the saving of souls
 - Peter said we would do well to pay attention to our calling to preach this word as a light in dark places
- So the Kingdom Program message is to be preached...
 - Not rudely, of course, and not without sensitivity, but with passion and an earnest concern for the person
 - Not merely conducted as a casual conversation to pass the time over coffee...but, like Paul, with passion

2Cor. 5:20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

- Proclaim it boldly knowing you are entrusted with a message from God that comes with spiritual power to save souls
- And after you have preached it, call the person to respond affirmatively
 - As salesmen would say, at the end of the pitch, ask for the business
 - If we can be bold in preaching about politics or fad diets, we can certainly be bold in preaching about Jesus
- Thirdly, Jesus gave us the content of the Kingdom Program message: "the Kingdom is at hand"

- Perhaps you were expecting something more than that? What about repenting or believing in Jesus or eternal life?
 - Well, that's included here too...Jesus is speaking in shorthand knowing His audience
 - Remember, we learned last week that Jesus directed His apostles in v.6 to go to the Jew first, and then to the Gentile later
- So at this point in the Kingdom Program, the message is specifically targeting the Jew living in first-century Palestine
 - And the Jews of Jesus' day would have fully understood the phrase "the Kingdom is at hand"
 - Every Jew knew this statement meant the Messiah had come to Israel and was ready to set up the promised Kingdom
- So for the apostles, this was a simple way to express the Gospel
 - And of course, Jesus naturally anticipated that a conversation might follow from that point
 - Some Jews ignored the proclamation without even a response... they would be a goat, not a lost sheep
 - Others may have asked questions and discussed the matter further, and in those conversations the fullness of the message would have been shared
- The point is Jesus directed His apostles to issue a clear, unambiguous proclamation that the Messiah had come to save Israel
 - Today, we live in a different time and our audience is very different
 - So naturally our proclamation will be worded differently
 - We won't say the Kingdom of God is "at hand" because it's more accurate to say the Kingdom of God is coming soon
 - And in fact, we might not say anything about the Kingdom at first, since non-Jews are unlikely to know what we're talking about
 - So we word the proclamation in ways that are more familiar to you and to your audience

- For example, we typically proclaim that Jesus is the Savior Who God sent to die in our place, to take the penalty for our sins
- And then we might call the person to accept this good news by placing faith in Jesus, and He will welcome you into His Kingdom
- On the other hand, if you're speaking with an unchurched person, your message might need to start farther back in Scripture in Genesis
 - You might proclaim the reality of sin and the need for atonement, to be forgiven by God before moving to the good news of Jesus
 - Of if you're speaking to a muslim or a Buddhist, you might take an entirely different approach
- But in all cases, the content of your Kingdom Program message is always the same
 - In whatever words you choose, the point of your message must remain "the kingdom is coming soon...receive your King"
 - Jesus did not give His Church liberty to change the content of His message or substitute a different message
 - The message of the Kingdom program is, once and always, the Gospel of Jesus dying for our sin to give us eternal life in a Kingdom to come
- Just to be absolutely clear, let's understand what the Kingdom program message *isn't*
 - Proclaiming that God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life is *not* the Kingdom program message
 - Proclaiming that God wants you to have your best life now is *not* the message
 - Proclaiming that God wants to heal your body or take away your emotional pain or bring you wealth and happiness are *not* the message
 - Proclaiming that God wants you to come to church or to be part of a community or to hear relevant messages about life coaching is *not* the kingdom program message
 - And the reason those things are not in the Kingdom program is because they do not save souls and they do not turn believers into disciples

- Those messages feed our egos, fill our church buildings and obscure the truth of Jesus' words
- Where the Kingdom program has been diluted and the message has been changed you find unsaved and undisciplined people
- The irony is that when an unbeliever agrees with a vapid, unbiblical proclamation, they are actually receiving their best life now
 - Because when they die, they will realize that the actual Kingdom program message did not promise your best life now
 - It promised you best life in eternity but great sacrifice now
- That's the message of the Kingdom program
 - It's a message that convicts the heart, exposes sin and makes clear we are not ok apart from Christ
 - And that we need His grace and mercy, we need His forgiveness and it's only available through the blood of Jesus
- That message will not affirm people and it may not fill our church building as fast as we desire
 - But that message has something no other message has: the power of God to bring a lost sheep to his or her knees in repentance
 - And to impart spiritual life and an eternity of glory upon a sinner
 - To transform a person into a disciple of Jesus, living with eyes for eternity, destined to reign with the King in a Kingdom to come
 - And to make them a messenger in the Kingdom program, willing to bring a message of hope to another lost sheep
- Friends, that's the message of our Kingdom program
 - We can't reserve it for just a few people...it's for everyone, everyday
 - We can't soften it or talk around it...it's to be preached boldly
 - And we can't water it down or substitute something more palatable in the hope of winning more converts
 - It's the power of God to saving of souls

- If we swap Jesus' part of this message for one of our own, we may very well win more converts
 - But we will be winning people to ourselves and not to Christ
 - You can fill buildings with converts to yourself, but you're supposed to bring lost sheep into the Kingdom
- I asked you last week to go out seeking for lost sheep, to see everyone you meet as a potential convert and trust God with the outcome
 - Now I'm asking you to do the same thing again, and this time to remember the circumstances, calling and content of your message
 - Do not be afraid to share your message...remember God saves, you are just the messenger
 - But dare God to show up in your day...see what He's willing to do through you if you just open your mouth as you go
- Secondly, preach this word boldly...don't fear the consequences, just be faithful to the Lord's direction
 - Make an appeal, ask the person to accept what you're saying and encourage a response in the moment
 - Preach to them knowing that a soul is on the line
- Finally, declare the Kingdom of God is at hand...that Jesus is the King, He is coming back, and He has died to cover their sins
 - So when that day comes, they will be able to enter the Kingdom and live eternally in glory
 - Don't change that message, because there is no better message
 - That's our Kingdom program message, and it's our mission...it's why the Church exists at all