

*** The Heights Baptist Church ***
*** Topic: Our Mission * Matthew 10 * 2/16/25 ***

MAIN POINT

Just as Jesus gave marching orders to His twelve apostles when He sent them out, He also has given us His great commission. The Heights Baptist Church has personalized this commission with the following mission statement: “Building relationships to help all people know and follow Jesus!”.

INTRODUCTION

What do you think of the following statement, “The mission of the church is accomplished more by the people of the church than by the programs of the church.”?

While programs are helpful to accomplish good things in the church, it is the people involved in those programs who are walking with Jesus and helping others know and follow Jesus better is a much more effective way to make disciples in the church.

Note to study leader: A mission statement communicates who we are, why we exist, and defines our purpose. That is what we will be discussing today. A vision statement looks to the future and defines how we will accomplish our Mission over a specific period of time. We will discuss our new vision statement next week.

Note to study leader: In today’s lesson, we will be discussing the new mission statement at the Heights: “Building relationships to help all people know and follow Jesus!”

UNDERSTANDING

Note to study leader: For this week’s lesson, we will use the “Think, Pair, Share” method to help participants digest our new mission statement. When using this method, have the class break up into small groups, perhaps into groups of four to six people per group. Then have the individual groups think about and discuss their ideas about our new mission statement. Finally, have the groups come together again in one larger group while having assigned small group spokespeople share the ideas the individual groups have come up with the entire class.

SMALL GROUP TIME

Write the new mission statement on the white board. Then break the class up into smaller groups of around four to six people per group. Have each group assign a spokesperson, and then have each group think about and brainstorm about how we as individuals and how we as a lifegroup can help carry out our mission; “building relationships to help all people know and follow Jesus!” We will provide some worksheets with the Mission Statement and the four following questions.

“Building relationships to help all people know and follow Jesus!”

Four questions to consider are:

1. How can we as individuals build relationships to help our non-Christian neighbors, co-workers, friends, and family members take one step closer to coming to know Christ?
2. How can we as a lifegroup build relationships to help our non-Christian neighbors, co-workers, friends, and family members take one step closer to coming to know Christ?
3. How can we as individuals build relationships in the church to help other Christians grow in their walk with Christ?
4. How can we as a lifegroup build relationships in the church to help other Christians grow in their walk with Christ?

After about 10 minutes, meet back together as a large group and have the spokespeople from each group share what their group has come up with for each of the four questions. (Adjust this amount of small group time based on how actively the groups are still discussing these topics). Capture the thoughts on the whiteboard.

TIME IN THE SCRIPTURES

In Matthew 10, Jesus gave his disciples specific instructions about a specific mission trip He sent them on. These instructions can help us see the need to be intentional about accomplishing our mission as a church.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ MATTHEW 10:16-23

What specific points is Jesus making with the two animal analogies (I'm sending you out like sheep among wolves; therefore, be shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves)?

We are to be as non-threatening as sheep, and also as wise and intentional as a serpent as we relate to the world while bringing them the gospel. This is required since there are spiritual and physical forces in the world that oppose Christ and His message. This opposition is found in people's sinful natures, in the philosophy of the world, and in the satanic forces operating here.

How can believers be both shrewd and harmless? What significance do you see in the fact that Jesus instructed His disciples to be both, rather than one or the other?

The word shrewd means intelligent, wise, prudent, thoughtful, and/or discreet. As obedient followers of Jesus, we need to be loving, intentional, non-threatening, and wise in the way we relate to non-Christians.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ MATTHEW 10:24-33

What point is being made with the sparrow comparison?

Jesus compared God's knowledge of the sparrows with His knowledge of you, a person created in His image. A penny is 1/16th of a day's wage. As inexpensive as two sparrows are, God knows when one of them falls to the ground. How much more, then, does He know each need and struggle we face?

What comfort should we get by the fact that God knows everything about us and still loves us?

We all bear God's image and are the focus of His redemptive love. It is very encouraging that God knows everything about us—including our weakness, failures, and sin—and still loves us.

How do you react to Jesus' statement in Matthew 10:32-33? What do these verses tell us about His expectations for us?

In Matthew 10:24-31, Jesus taught that there is no reason to fear persecution from men. For this reason, believers should not fear confessing Jesus before others. If we are truly saved, we in our new natures should have a built-in desire to share Christ with others.

What does it look like to live our lives acknowledging Jesus as Lord?

These words of Jesus were set in the context of persecution and trial (16-25) and speak to a person's whole life rather than just one instance. As Paul said in Galatians 2:20, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." We need to set aside our wants, desires, and personal ambition while making a priority of living in obedience to Christ while seeking first the Kingdom of heaven.

ASK VOLUNTEERS TO READ MATTHEW 10:34-39, JOHN 3:19-21, AND 2 CORINTHIANS 2:14-16

Why will the wonderful news of the gospel and salvation by grace bring division rather than peace?

The gospel is wonderful news. But part of that message is that we are all sinners. Without that message, people will not see their need for a Savior. And people who don't want to submit to God won't want to acknowledge there will literally be hell to pay for their decision. So the gospel message is offensive to them. People whose lives have been changed by God may find themselves at odds with some of the people they are most close to in earthly terms. And followers of Christ may also find themselves at war with the culture in general. New life in Jesus includes inherently new choices and an altered world view.

It would be easier for us to stay home and watch TV rather than to actively do our part in sharing the gospel with others. How does the truth Jesus shared in verses 38-39 relate to this?

We need to set aside our personal "rights", comfort, ambition, etc. to advance Christ's kingdom.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ MATTHEW 10:40-42

What do these verses indicate about what it means to acknowledge Jesus before others?

What reward is there for those who publicly acknowledge Jesus in kindness toward others?

Jesus' overall message in this passage shows that acknowledging Him is far more than lip service. It involves sacrifice, service, and love. Those who acknowledge the Lord are promised heavenly rewards.

APPLICATION

In chapter 7 of the book, "The Gospel Centered Life" (study guide by Robert Thune and Will Walker), the following statement is made:

"When God's grace is working on us and in us, it will also work itself out through us. The internal renewal of our minds and hearts creates an external propulsion that moves us out in service to others."

What important lessons that relate to our mission statement are we reminded of in these statements?

First, we need to look at the gospel not only as a means of helping us grow in our walk with Christ, but also as a means of helping others know and follow Jesus. Also, we need to help others know and follow Jesus through the power God gives us, not in fleshly efforts (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ MATTHEW 16:24

Our mission is to help others know and follow Jesus. What does this verse tell us about what is required to follow Jesus? How do we apply what He says?

Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus.

Note to study leader: The Greek words used in Jesus' commands to "deny" yourself and "take up" your cross are both in the "aorist", or one-time tense, while "follow" is in the present, ongoing tense. This shows the need to make a lordship decision when you choose to follow Jesus and then daily choose to walk with Him from that moment on. We see the first part of this when someone receives Christ into their hearts and follow him as their Lord and Savior. Then we all need to daily choose to follow Him.

Focus on the sermon today about the vision of our church, and ask yourself, "Am I involved in what God is doing through our church? Is there a way I can better serve the church with my time, talents, resources, and spiritual gifts?"

Considering the list we built based on the four questions in our small group time, what specific things can we do as individuals and as a lifegroup to better carry out our mission as a church?

What can I do to better be as shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves as I relate to my non-Christian family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers this week?

PRAYER

Ask God to give us the wisdom, intentionality, and boldness we need to be shrewd as serpents and harmless as doves as we share the gospel with the people He puts in our path this week.

COMMENTARY

Matthew 10

10:1-4. Jesus designated 12 of His disciples as “apostles”, which means “sent ones”. He gives them this collective title as He sends them out. Note that Bartholomew is also called Nathaniel, and Thaddius is also called Judas (not Iscariot).

10:5-7. As a direct result of seeing the urgency of the need, Jesus named His disciples and sent out these 12. They had been with Jesus, and now it was their turn to act; they too were to minister to others. The disciples were not to go to other nations, that is, to Gentiles. One reason for this was that one of Christ’s missions at his first coming was to offer the kingdom of heaven to His chosen people Israel. And only after Israel rejected Him and had him crucified would the gospel be taken to the gentiles (Act 1:8, Romans 11:25-32). As a result of their disobedience, God is having mercy on the gentiles, and afterward, He will again have mercy on Israel.

10:8. Each activity described here was a part of Jesus’ ministry also. His mission became the mission of the disciples. Notice also the proclamation part of the mission was to be complemented by actions. Words alone are not nearly as effective as when they are combined with deeds of kindness. One of my seminary professors said that by meeting physical needs we earn the right to proclaim the message of a caring God.

10:9-10. All missionaries are dependent on the support of other believers. The first missionaries were not to take money with them. The disciples would learn to depend on God to meet their needs as they ministered to others.

10:11-13. To find out who is worthy does not mean the disciples were to decide who could receive the gospel and who could not. The intention was actually quite practical. Find people who are receptive to the message and set up a home base there. To greet a household meant to “genuinely desire their welfare.” This gesture describes basic Christian manners. It also sets up the condition by which the missionaries would know if they were welcomed in that home.

10:14. The gesture of shaking the dust off your feet was a serious sign of judgment. The person had missed an opportunity of eternal importance. The refusal had grave consequences. The seriousness of these matters highlights the urgency of the mission. The collective rejection of the Messiah led to the woes being pronounced on the towns in Matthew 11:20-24. Part of this was picturing that Israel would reject their Messiah, and as a result, the gospel would be taken to the gentiles.

10:15. Just as there will be degrees of reward in heaven based on what we’ve done on earth, it appears there will be degrees of judgment based on the amount of light that has been rejected (Matt. 11:22-24).

10:16. “I send you out as sheep” “in the midst of wolves,” see Matt. 7:15-27; Luke 10:3; John 10:12; Acts 20:29. Believers must be wise but innocent (see Rom. 16:19). They were to avoid losing a hearing for the gospel due to improper methods, but remain bold proclaimers of the gospel.

10:17. The courts referred to local Jewish synagogue courts. This mission assignment of the Disciples had prophetic implications. “Scourge” referred to Jewish flogging (see Deut. 25:3), which consisted of one less than forty lashes, one-third on the front of the body and two-thirds on the back (see 2 Cor. 11:24). The synagogue was the local place of worship, education and welfare relief.

10:18. This referred to the universal spread of the gospel (see Matt. 28:19-20). It is important that the narrow exclusiveness of v. 5 be balanced by this verse.

10:19. This speaks of special illumination and grace during persecution. This is not a proof-text for preachers and teachers not studying before proclaiming.

10:20. Expanding on the “shrewd as snakes” part of his instruction (10:16), Jesus warned, be on your guard against men. This warning sweeps broadly. This conveys the reality that all types of people would betray and persecute Christ’s followers—even family (10:21–22, 34–36).

While the “trials” and “floggings” of 10:17 involve persecution at the local level, Jesus warns that some of his followers would gain attention at higher levels of authority—even governors and kings. The phrase “On my account” means, “because of your association with me.” But as intimidating as such high-level audiences would be, they served a good purpose toward the goals of Jesus’ mission. How else would Jesus’ followers be able to bear testimony as witnesses to these officials and many of the populations they oversaw?

10:21. This speaks of the radical commitment necessary for discipleship which supersedes even family love and often caused confrontation within families (see vv. 34-39).

10:22. Some disciples are required to die for Christ. Their complete loyalty to Christ must not be compromised with even the closest of family relationships (10:34–37). Jesus was raising the stakes for the Twelve. If the thought of being betrayed by a brother, child, or parent was too much for them, they could turn back now. And of the eleven who were truly following Christ, all but John died a martyr’s death.

Jesus’ sweeping warning of 10:17 to “Be on your guard against men”, is further underscored in 10:22: All men will hate you because of me. This statement is hyperbolic, because some people would respond to the gospel and love the Lord and his disciples. But the statement is more than accurate in that people of all categories would hate the Lord and his disciples. The meaning is, “You [plural] will be continually being hated.” The persecution and hatred would not end quickly; Jesus’ followers must buckle down for a long ordeal.

10:23. While Israel was a small nation (75 miles wide by 125 miles long), there was still a significant area to cover, and Jesus communicated a sense of urgency. When a disciple met with persecution in one city, he was to flee to another city, both for his own safety and to avoid wasting effort on a rejecting audience. Jesus was pointing out that they wouldn’t be able to complete this mission before the Son of Man comes. There are different opinions about exactly what Jesus meant by this. One thought is that they wouldn’t complete this first mission before Christ would arrive in these towns. Another possible interpretation is that Jesus is referring to the fact Israel would soon be destroyed by Rome (70 AD) before Christ returns, and the disciples’ mission would not be completed before then. Another view is Jesus is referring to his second coming, and that not every person in Israel will hear the gospel before then. But His main point still stands. That the time the disciples have to share this message is limited and to keep moving.

10:24. Believers must seek to avoid unnecessary stirring up trouble. Our goal is to draw people to Christ, not win an argument. But Jesus, who presented the message of the good news of the kingdom still faced persecution, even leading to death on the cross. And we as His disciples are not above Him, so we must be willing to face a similar fate if God requires that of us.

10:25. In Matthew 10:16-25, Jesus described the type of persecution and opposition the disciples would encounter. The language anticipates future persecution also when Christians would be handed over to government authorities. In the face of such opposition a Christian can rely on God’s care and support (Matt. 10:26-31). Christians have never been promised an easy task, but they are promised the companionship and approval of God.

Beelzebul was a compound term from “Ba’al” and “zebul.” This was the local Ba’al of Ekron (2 Kings 1:16) combined with “Zebul,” the chief demon in Jewish folklore (see Matt. 12:24; Luke 11:15). The Jews changed the names of pagan gods by to make fun of them. “Beel” can be translated as “Lord of the dung.”

10:26 Kingdom work can be intimidating and even physically dangerous. Knowing this, Jesus three times in this passage said, don't be afraid. "Therefore" hearkens back to the idea in the previous section (Matt. 10:16-25). There Jesus warned that He had been accused of being in league with Satan and His followers could expect no better treatment. However, they could be encouraged knowing they shared this experience with their Lord. They can take encouragement from the fact their good work will not be overlooked or forgotten. A second truth is that who reject the work of God's people and persecute them will be judged.

10:27 This verse follows the form of parallelism in the previous verse. This literary and rhetorical method is often found in the Psalms and Proverbs. It involves stating the same truth twice using slightly different, though related, words or symbolism. The central truth of this verse is that believers are to be bold in their proclamation. Persecution may tempt them to silence, but Jesus' assurance should help them overcome their fear and speak in the light and proclaim on the housetops the truth of the gospel.

10:28 There is a fate worse than death, and it involves disobedience to God. God is far more powerful than any human. Another person can only kill the body. Our souls are secure in God if we place ourselves under his grace, and our souls will be lost if we reject Him.

10:29 A penny is 1/16th of a day's wage. As inexpensive as two sparrows are, God knows when one of them falls to the ground. Thus, He knows each need and struggle we face. One other interesting note, the word for "fall" may be translated from an Aramaic word that describes a bird's lighting on the ground. The meaning is that God knows about all the activity of a sparrow, not simply when it falls dead to the ground. This would certainly be of more comfort to an embattled disciple.

10:30 Another fear related to persecution is the fear of bodily harm and death. But Jesus helped his disciples to shift their focus. He told them, in essence, "Do not worry about your body. It is expendable. Concern yourself, instead, with the condition of your soul-life, which is eternal, and which, if invested rightly now, returns great reward" (16:24-27). A believer who adopts this perspective will not be afraid of those who can kill the body but will fear God' the Lord who has authority as judge to condemn the soul and the body to eternal destruction in hell. This healthy fear of God will cause a person to live by obedience, respecting the authority and power of the judge (Prov. 1:7).

10:31 Jesus lets us know that our Father, who even cares about what happens to the lesser creatures (an insignificant sparrow), cares much more deeply about us (people made in his image who have chosen to follow Him). The price of sparrows used in sacrifices (10:29)—two for the smallest copper coin—is intended to emphasize our significance compared to a bird; while the numbering of one's hairs (10:30) by the Father emphasizes the detailed knowledge God has about us, and how much He values and cares for his children.

10:32 The Christian message is inherently divisive, and we cannot get around that reality. Part of the message is that we are sinners in need of a savior. This message will be lifegiving to some, and highly offensive to others (2 Corinthians 2:16).

10:33. Because there is no reason to fear persecution from men (10:24-31), believers should not fear confessing Jesus before others. The person who can adopt the fearless perspective Jesus teaches and who confesses Jesus before men will find a willing advocate in heaven before the Father. But the person who gives into faithless fear and denies Jesus before men will find a just denial (of reward and reign; 2 Tim. 2:11-13) before the Father in heaven.

10:34-36. The king wanted his followers fully prepared for the difficulty they would face because of their loyalty to him, so he addressed a possible misconception. In 5:9, Jesus pronounced the "peacemakers" as being blessed. But here he announced that his mission on earth would cause not peace, but hostility (a sword)—even between the closest of family members (10:21). He was not saying that he would intentionally divide families. But he was saying that loyalty to him would cause some of his followers to be hated by their families, because of the disbelief of other family members.

To further explain his prediction of hostility, Jesus quoted Micah 7:6 in 10:35-36. In Micah, this verse comes at the end of a lament about Israel's misery (Mic. 7:1-6), because of the Lord's judgment on them at the time of King Ahaz (Mic. 6). But the verse immediately following (Mic. 7:7) is a contrasting note of hope: "But as for me, I watch in hope for the LORD, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me." The remainder of Micah (7:8-20) is prophecy and prayer about Israel's restoration. Those familiar with Jesus' quote in its original context would see the family hostility as a reference to God's judgment on unbelieving Israel and see the hopeful future beyond the devastating difficulties.

10:37-39. Jesus now moved from his warning about the divisions and hostility which his followers would encounter to clarify the standard for the follower worthy of him. First, the worthy follower will love Jesus more than anyone else—even one's own family (10:37). Immediately following the quote of Micah 7:6, he issued this challenge: "If you find yourself faced with a choice between loyalty to an unbelieving and hostile family member and loyalty to me, I have to take priority." He was not assuming that everyone would have to leave his or her family. Jesus' demands here amount to one more declaration of his deity. One of the highest duties in all Judaism was to love family members, especially parents. Every faithful Jew knew and understood that only God himself could demand a higher love (Deut. 6:4-5; 13:6-11).

Second, the worthy follower will endure the mockery and suffering involved in following Jesus (10:38). Matthew referred here to the cross. The criminal had to carry the crossbeam—usually through an angry, chiding mob—to the site of the execution. Jesus stated that his faithful followers would experience some degree of suffering and shame. Jesus used this powerful imagery again in 16:24-27, after his first prediction of his death.

In addition, the worthy follower will give up all of their individual "rights" to the king, together with any possessions, passions, pastimes, or people that might distract from following him. In "losing" these lesser aspects of earthly life, the follower "finds" true worth—God's purpose, joy, and reward.

10:40-42. "Little ones" (10:42) was a term of affection that Jesus used toward his disciples, particularly when they followed him with the innocence and faith of a child (18:1-6; 19:13-15). He would use the same terminology in 25:31-46, asserting that those he sent represented him, and any kind of response to them was equivalent to a response to him in person. A cup of cold water given to a disciple was a gift that even the poorest person could give, and will result in a reward from Jesus.

Jesus will evaluate the service of every Christian at His judgment seat and reward us for we've done as Christians (1 Cor. 3:10-15). This judgment does not impact our salvation, and what this reward will look like is not clear. But we can know that Christ sees how we are serving Him, and we will be rewarded for our work. And the reward we look forward to far outweighs any temporary struggles we face in this life while serving Christ (Rom. 8:18 and 2 Cor. 4:17-18).