

Jesus' Mission Gives Freedom

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Preacher: Joe Hall

- [0 : 0 0] I don't know about you, I've never seen a job advertised with the words, every day is the same. Jenny says, every day I come to work and it's the same thing I did yesterday.
- I just love the predictability of my weeks. Have you ever heard that? Sometimes there are adverts on the radio, be a prison officer, be a bus driver, be a teacher.
- They all say, don't they, every day is different. There's always a new challenge. I get to work with so many amazing people and it fits right around my life.
- Amazing, isn't it? Now I'm sure within reason that's true, but work is work. I'm pretty sure Jenny doesn't come home from the bus depot every night full of crazy stories about what happened to her on the Langstrath.
- I'm sure she doesn't go to bed at night dreaming gleefully about what unpredictable challenges are going to meet her the next day as she goes back to the bus depot.
- [1 : 0 8] Now I hope whatever it is that you are waking up for tomorrow does excite you. But tonight I want to tell you about a life that really is different.
- There really are fresh challenges every week. You really do get to meet so many different interesting people and it fits right around your life.
- It's the life that Jesus is speaking about in our passage tonight. And if you are one of Jesus' followers, friends, this is your life.
- It's the life that Jesus gives to his followers. Now we've had a little break from Matthew's gospel. We started in September.
- We got to chapter 9 in May. And now we're starting again, picking it up in our evening services. It is a slow burn. I'll admit we're planning over three years to cover this book because we want to be slow-cooked Christians, right?
- [2 : 1 2] And not char-grilled Christians. What's the difference? We want a steady, warm heat on our hearts over a long period of time, don't we?
- Not a flash-in-the-pan faith that doesn't grow and it doesn't last. No, that's the opposite of what Jesus wants. He doesn't say, does he, at the end of this gospel, go and make converts of all nations.
- He says, go and make disciples of all nations. Jesus is not interested in a one-time-I-prayed-the-sinner's-prayer commitment.
- He wants a lifelong, everyday faith that walks with him. And that's what Matthew's gospel is all about. We've seen he's organized his gospel around five blocks of Jesus' teaching because Jesus says, when you go and make disciples, baptize them and teach them everything I have commanded you.
- So here you go, says Matthew. Here's your instruction manual. Okay, you've put your L plates on. You're ready to learn Jesus. Well, here's how he instructs you.
- [3 : 2 3] All 28 chapters. That's why we're taking years over it, that we might learn to live by it. We might learn Jesus in his gospel.

So tonight we're starting the second of those five blocks of teaching. It's one of the shorter blocks. And if you were to guess from our reading what the theme of this bit of teaching is, I wonder what would you say?

What's going to be the theme of this bit of teaching? Okay, I'll give you a clue. Just look at the last two verses of chapter 9. They're lead-in verses.

What would you say from those lead-in verses is going to be the big idea in chapter 10? Jesus said to his disciples, the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.

Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. And now the sermon title, which you can see sort of gives it away, doesn't it?

[4 : 27] The big idea is sending out workers. And the shorthand that we often use for that is the word mission, which just comes from the Latin word, from the word to send.

So that's the big idea. Chapter 10 is all about Jesus getting his followers ready to be sent out to work for, to witness to him in a lost nation, in lost homes, and to lost communities.

Now, as I was getting ready this week, I thought, isn't it interesting that that's the bit that we normally save for last? Isn't that what we normally do?

Once I've been a Christian long enough, once I know what there is to know, once I'm further on, once I'm in a better place in my life, once I've got more time, once I've got more freedom.

But Matthew puts it second out of five things. Even in our vision statement, what is it? Gather in, build up, reach out, send out.

[5 : 36] It comes at the end. But this is pause for thought, isn't it? That Jesus doesn't even wait to die and rise again before he's sending his followers out to tell people the good news that he has come.

And so tonight, following Matthew, I just want us to see that Jesus does send us on mission. And then as we begin to dip into his teaching, how Jesus frees us for his mission.

Two points there. Firstly, Jesus sends us on mission as his people. Verse 35 begins by reminding us that Jesus himself has come on a mission and just have a look, remind yourself what's been happening in Matthew up to now.

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. We've seen that's in a nutshell, chapters five to nine.

So five, six, and seven, the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus proclaimed the good news that now God's good and loving rule and reign was coming to bear on the world in a new way.

[6 : 48] He had come. And eight and nine, he proved that by healing the sick, raising the dead, casting out demons. Our new government was elected on the back of the word change, wasn't it?

And one of the questions I've heard most often put to ministers since then is so when will things start to feel like they're changing? It's the obvious question, isn't it?

You want to change things. So when you have the power to change things, well, when will things begin to change? It's a hard question to answer. But Jesus didn't need to be asked twice.

If God's kingdom is here, Jesus, when are we going to start to see it? Right now, he says. Literally on his way down from the pulpit, he's met by a man with leprosy and he makes him clean, healed, done.

There's a new kingdom in town. Aslan is on the move. King Jesus has come and he is on mission. Things are starting to change.

[7 : 57] But up to this point in the gospel, Jesus has been a one-man mission. He's been the one saying and doing stuff. The difference now in these verses is that Jesus turns to the twelve and gives them authority to say what he's been saying and to do what he's been doing.

But why does he do that? Just look at verses 36 and 37. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.

Then he said to his disciples, the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Jesus isn't a military strategist, is he, with maps and charts laid out in front of him.

He sends out workers out of his very heart. And when it says he had compassion, the Greek word is *splanknizo*. I practice that.

You don't need to be a Greek scholar to know what it means. It sounds like exactly what it means. It's the pang, the ache in your heart when you see something that genuinely moves you, that touches you, that brings tears to your eyes.

[9 : 20] Jesus was moved with compassion in his heart when he saw the crowds because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. You see these signs, don't you?

If you're out for a walk in the country, keep dogs on the lead. Sheep can be easily startled, fines for troubling livestock, things like that. Jesus looks out on the field and sees the dogs let loose.

And their owners are nowhere to be seen. And the sheep are in a panic. They're running this way and that. They don't know what to do. They are harassed and they are helpless. And his heart turns within him.

And his compassion grows warm and tender. Friends, if the Jesus in your head is someone who's a bit fed up of you, a bit tired of having to step in again to fix up your mess, hear this.

He sees lost and helpless people and his inner being aches with compassion towards us. The crowds need a shepherd to come and save them from danger, find the sheep who've bolted, bind up their wounds, and Jesus has gladly and willingly become that very shepherd.

[10 : 44] His heart goes out for his sheep. So what does he do with his compassion? Then he said to his disciples, the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.

Now notice how the metaphor has changed, but the theme hasn't. Jesus is still looking at a field. But notice, whereas before he saw troubled sheep, now he sees ripe grain.

More to the point, he sees people who are at one and the same time troubled sheep and ripe grain. Do you see that? Right, verses 36 and 37, we love to tear these verses, don't we, out of context.

Verse 36 is pastoral. Verse 37 is missional. Right? Verse 36 is for hurting people. Verse 37 is for people who need a push out the door.

But they are both both. Can we see that? Jesus sees people wandering spiritually and getting hurt in their lostness, and in his compassion for them, he sends workers to gather them into his kingdom.

[11 : 58] We sometimes talk about mercy mission. Perhaps you've heard that before. What we mean by that is things like food banks, things like night shelters, very practical things that meet people at their point of need in Jesus' name.

There's nothing wrong with that. Much of that is great. But when Jesus was moved with compassion for suffering people, he sent evangelists.

This is his mercy mission. Ask the Lord of the harvest, he says, to send out workers into his harvest field.

Because I am compassionate, says Jesus, and the need is so very great. Pray prayers like this, says Jesus. Lord, we grieve the suffering we see in people's lives, and it hurts our hearts to know that they are going through life without you.

So please would you send out workers who will introduce them to yourself. Please will you have someone meet them who is able to tell them about your good and loving rule and reign in their darkness, lostness, and brokenness.

[13 : 16] Now that puts flesh on the bones, doesn't it, of some of our prayers. We're good at praying for people to hear the gospel, but how can they hear without someone preaching to them, and how can they preach to them unless they are sent?

Paul wrote that, but Jesus got there first. Join up your prayers, he says, for a suffering world, with your prayers for a lost world, and then pray specifically that I would send people, individuals, workers, to go and bring suffering sinners in.

And I love this. It's like the 12 disciples. They get down on their knees. Right, Lord, brothers, let's pray. Please, Lord, please send out workers into the harvest. Then they get up, dust off their knees, and Jesus says, prayer answered.

Verse 1, Jesus called his 12 disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits to heal every disease and illness. Hang on a minute, Lord. You don't mean us, do you?

Oh, yeah. Verse 5, these 12 Jesus sent out with the following instructions. Do not go among the Gentiles or any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.

[14 : 38] As you go, proclaim this message. The kingdom of heaven has come near. No sooner have they prayed that prayer than they are sent by the Lord of the harvest.

Brothers and sisters, it is a risky thing to ask the Lord to send out workers because there is a good chance that he might send you. It's like when someone in a meeting asks, so who's going to go and speak to so-and-so then?

Thanks for volunteering. Put your name down. Friends, when you ask the Lord to send someone to tell people about Jesus, don't be surprised if an opportunity comes up in a conversation to tell someone about how Jesus came into your life.

Don't be shocked if someone asks you what you get up to on the weekend. He is answering your prayers. So this is your challenge this week.

Pray this prayer. Right? Jesus says, pray for this. Pray for this. Right? I know people who set their alarms to go off at 10.38 to remind them to pray a quick prayer on the basis of Matthew 10.38.

[15 : 54] Right? Maybe that's a helpful thing for you this week to do that. Maybe you just incorporate it into your normal prayer time. But pray this prayer every week and see what the Lord does in your heart and life.

On the one hand, it is a prayer for the Lord to set apart workers for the gospel. Matthew's really clear at this point that Jesus sent the 12.

He names them, and it's the first time in the New Testament that they're called apostles, verse 2, which is the Greek word for sent. So Jesus sends these named people on his mission.

So on one hand, it is a prayer for the Lord to send individuals that they might set aside their time fully for gospel work.

That's a great prayer. The Free Church of Scotland has a target of having 17 new ministers over the next 10 years. But currently, there aren't even enough people going into training to sustain the level that we're at.

[16 : 59] And apparently, that's not just true in the Free Church that we're part of, but across gospel churches throughout the UK. So pray, therefore, that the Lord would put ministry on men's hearts and send workers into the harvest field in our country.

You could pray, as we have, for the work at ETS, our training center in Edinburgh, or the ministry training academy here in Aberdeen, where men and women are equipped for gospel work.

You could pray, as we have, specifically for Joe Tuk, who's starting a training program with us in just a couple of weeks, for his own growth in godliness and character and gifts, and others like him who are being trained in local churches.

You could pray for our mission partners throughout the world who tell the gospel in all sorts of different languages and in different places. You see, there are so many ways you can pray for the Lord to send out set-apart workers into his harvest field.

And Jesus commands that we do that, and Jesus teaches us that that is a compassionate thing to pray for lost people around us and in the world.

[18 : 15] On the other hand, though, this is, I think, a prayer for every follower of Jesus to be, if not gospel workers, then gospel people and sent people.

So, we're not apostles, but we all have the apostles' message in our hands, in our hearts, in our mouths. The kingdom of God is here, we say.

King Jesus came from heaven to turn our hearts and lives, our homes, our communities, our nation, our world, the right way up through his death and resurrection.

The kingdom of heaven is here. And so, brothers and sisters, I think we can hardly pray, Lord, there are so many people who don't know you and so few people to tell them without surely our own hearts being moved to compassion by that prayer.

That's why Jesus sends these guys, isn't it? Partly his compassion, partly the sheer numbers. The harvest is plentiful, the workers are few.

[19 : 27] Right? Do the math. Eight billion people won Jesus. Twelve apostles is a good start. Right?

Five million people in Scotland, about a hundred free church ministers. There are four staff at Bon Accord. Right?

It's good. But it's not everything that is needed, is it? It can't be the whole answer. Brothers and sisters, we are all part of the answer to this prayer.

Perhaps not directly, but we definitely get the rebound, don't we? Yes, these guys are called apostles, but before that, what are they called? Simply, verse one, his twelve disciples.

Twelve learners. Right? Twelve followers. Jesus sends these guys out, not when they've been through seminary. He sends them with their L plates still stuck on by his authority, under his instruction and with their gospel, they go.

[20 : 33] So pray this prayer this week and just see what happens. That's all I'm asking. I'm not saying, I'm not saying, go and talk to five people about Jesus.

I'm not saying that. Just pray this prayer and see what happens. We've got three Sundays in chapter 10 of Matthew. Wouldn't it be a great answer to prayer if by the end of those three weeks we were a church on the edge of our seats, just ready and waiting like springs to be sent out to the lost people in our lives?

And it's in the Lord's hands what happens then. But Jesus would have us ready, wouldn't he, and prepared for that. And before we move on to our second point, I wanted to read you something from Don Carson's book on Matthew that I found really helpful as I got back into things after holiday.

I think this is a good thing for us to hear over the summer. Things do quieten down a little bit, don't they? Don Carson says this, of course rest is necessary, but Christians can never treat the relationship between ministry and rest in the same way that the world treats the relationship between work and holidays.

Many, he says, see their vacations as the end or purpose of their work and even of life itself. Their work earns a holiday. They deserve a vacation.

[22 : 00] When they return, he says, from their two or three weeks, they hate the thought of going back to work. They can hardly wait for the next set of holidays. By contrast, the Christian loves to serve.

ministry of all kinds is the end, the purpose. Holidays, he says, are simply a means to that end.

Far from serving in order to earn a rest, we take rests now and then in order to serve the better. friends, if you're getting a break over the summer, please enjoy it.

Make the most of things being quieter in the church calendar. Go and have a rest, please. But there is no such thing as there from having a holiday, from being a Christian.

And whatever rest you get, please make sure it's refueling you to step back on the gas in the Lord's work when you return. Let's be about as a people, taking the gospel out from here.

[23 : 06] Jesus turns our whole world upside down, doesn't he? That's not how we function. But that's who we are now in his kingdom. Jesus sends us on mission. And secondly, and more briefly, Jesus frees us for mission.

I just want to touch on Jesus' instructions this evening. There's a lot here. I think, though, I think the purpose of these first verses is to free us up to be sent.

Now, going on holiday with children can feel like a mission. We packed an unbelievable amount of stuff. Every sock, every plastic dinosaur needed its special bag.

Packing the car was like Tetris. Making sure we've got the right instructions for the place we're staying, the right route on the map, the cars fueled up and everything.

But, you know, as soon as the car pulls away from the house, I experience an overwhelming sense of freedom, knowing that there's only now one thing we need to think about.

[24 : 12] Right? Everything else is either in the car or it's not. And whatever's left at home can stay there because we're not going back. Mission holiday has started.

Now, when I say that Jesus frees us for mission, it's that kind of freedom that I mean. When we hear about freedom in our society, people are generally talking about I'm free to do whatever I want.

Right? I'm free from restrictions and limitations. Most people would not call a whole holiday freeing. On mission holiday, I can't do whatever I want.

I need to go to a certain place at a certain time. I need to get ready in a certain way. Otherwise, it doesn't work. But I am free from having to worry about anything else.

On mission holiday, I have one thing to think about and everything else is taken care of. Jesus' mission is like that. Jesus says he frees us from our burdens.

[25 : 14] Freedom from our sins, verse 8. Freely you have received. Right? You didn't have to pay or work for the gospel. You freely received it.

Salvation, your sins taken away. Freedom from being in need, verses 9 and 10. Right? Don't overpack, he says. You'll be just given what you need along the way.

And now some mission organizations insist that their workers live by faith. What they mean is kind of donation to donation. I think that misses the link with chapter 6 where Jesus says actually we all live like this every day.

Seek first God's kingdom and righteousness, he says, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about itself.

Right? We all live by faith every day. That doesn't mean we don't plan, but it does mean we can take risks and leave stuff behind, take a pay cut, put our lives on the line for him, make a loss for him and the gospel and he will make sure we've got what we need as we go for him and speak for him.

[26 : 32] It's what he says here, isn't it? And freedom from rejection, verse 14, if anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet.

Now, in its context, this is a mission to Israel and they had had countless opportunities to respond to the good news. So, if a town rejects the message, now, it's not strike one, understand, it's strike 300.

I think that's why verse 15 is there. It's worth saying that Sodom and Gomorrah didn't get the same chances to turn back, but these towns in Israel did time and time again.

So, how much worse will it be, says Jesus, not only to have offended God, but then to have repeatedly rejected his grace and offers of forgiveness. So, if that happens, says Jesus, you're free to walk away.

You've done what you could. You're free from needing to get a better response. Now, friends, elsewhere, Jesus speaks of his patience and perseverance with people.

[27 : 42] But it does free us, doesn't it, from needing people to accept us or to accept our message before we move on, to know that he didn't need to be accepted before he moved on.

The time might come when you get a new job, you need to move closer to family, new people come into your life, and the people who you have invited to the carol service year after year after year, people you've prayed for every week, people you've had around your dinner table with people from church, people you've asked to church again and again and again, don't get to see you anymore.

And that's hard, but it's okay, says Jesus. Our mission isn't to make people Christians, it's to tell people a message, and that message might be rejected.

Don't give up on the first try, but if it comes time to move on, Jesus gives us freedom to do that. See, there is freedom, brothers and sisters, from the burdens of our sin, the burden of our need, the burden for acceptance in Jesus' mission.

But Jesus also gives us freedom for things, freedom to do things we wouldn't otherwise do. You're free to be lavish with the gospel. Freely you've received, freely give.

[29 : 09] If you know Jesus' generosity and lavishness and his forgiveness coming to meet you in your sin, you are free to love lost people in a generous, self-giving, sacrificial way by sharing the gospel with them again and again, willingly, gladly, often.

And Jesus gives us freedom to meet people. Brothers and sisters, you are free to tell anyone and everyone about Jesus, forgiveness. Where it says about staying in someone's house and giving it your greeting, it's not like, have you seen Marie Kondo?

It's not like that. Okay, she tidies people's houses basically, but when she goes in, she has to do this special ceremony and kneel down and sort of say a greeting to the house. It's not like that. It's talking about greeting the household, the people in the house.

And the way you greet someone in Hebrew is peace to you. And so, says Jesus, if people welcome you as a follower of Jesus, let your peace stay.

And if people don't welcome you, take it with you. The point is you're free to make friends. Jesus gives us freedom to meet, to talk, to as many people as there are, to go to people's houses, to have them in our houses.

[30 : 29] If people accept us as Christians in their lives, we have made a friend. Now, we can't be friends with everyone. Some people won't accept us as the Lord's people in their life.

But Jesus says his sheep know his voice. If you call across a field of sheep, some will look up and others will keep grazing. If you talk about your faith to ten people, some will listen, some will turn away.

So, Jesus says, on his mission, with the limited time and energy you have, let your peace, let your friendship rest with those who are willing to listen to you talk about your faith, even if they don't share it.

Now, you might be surprised by who that is, but the point is that there's no one we shouldn't try to be friends with for Jesus. Right?

We're free from worrying about who will and won't be friends with us. It's not a concern. Don't worry about it. You see what I mean by freedom? Brothers and sisters, as the Lord's followers, we have one job in life and Jesus takes care of the rest.

[31 : 45] We are freed up to give everything to his mission. Now, I said at the beginning, this is a life that's really different and there really aren't two weeks that are going to be the same.

It's not predictable, it's not repetitive, it's risky, if anything, it's uncertain. But do you know there's nothing that I've said that requires you to move house?

There's nothing I've said that requires you to quit your job. As you pray, it might be that you want to make a change, to make room in your life for Jesus' mission.

I knew a guy in Edinburgh who got a new job because he realized that in his previous position, he hadn't talked to anyone about Jesus for five years. So he made a change.

But most of us are already free for Jesus' mission. Most of us do have people in our lives, classmates, co-workers, family members, or neighbors and friends, moms and dads at the school gate, people who serve you your coffee, people who deliver your shopping, people you sit next to at the football, loads and loads of people, you get the idea, lost sheep in our lives.

[32 : 59] And Jesus has set you free from worrying about what it might cost you to introduce them to the good shepherd. You have a job, but don't worry if you lose it.

You have a home, but don't worry about being thought of as those weird Christian neighbors next door. You have friends, but don't worry about them never coming to church when you ask them for years and years.

Friends, we have been set free from having to worry about any of those things. Jesus will take care of it. We're free from anxiety about telling everyone that God's king has come.

And if your life is all about sharing Jesus' message, then whatever you do, no week in your life will ever be the same. So as we finish tonight, I want us each just to take a minute in silence to pray to the Lord of the harvest that he would set our hearts free from the anxieties that would stop us from being on mission this week.

I don't know what they are for you, but before the Lord, would you ask him to free you to take the opportunities that he gives you?

[34 : 27] And would you pray for him to send his workers out into the harvest field? We'll take a minute for that and then I'll lead us in a word of prayer.

Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.