

Matthew 10: Principles for Missions

By Bob Young

Introduction

My interest in and commitment to missions has me continually seeking biblical models of missions. How was mission work done in the first century? Can we identify models of missions? What principles should guide us? What are biblical methods and goals? I have asked this question again and again in reading and studying Acts.

In studying Matthew recently, it struck me that Jesus was sending his disciples on a mission in Matthew 10. The second major discourse of Matthew, recorded in Matthew 10, gives us insight into the mission and helps us in our study of missions. What can we learn from this text? The context is the commissioning and sending of the Twelve. Jesus gives specific instructions related to the mission. These instructions and words of encouragement still provide guidance those who go forth today with the message of Jesus. I call these “principles for missions.” They come directly from the text of Matthew 10.

First, Jesus is the teacher; Jesus is the example.

Missions is not about us, it is not about the workers. Missions is not the goal; the goal is to develop disciples of Jesus. The goal is to help other people become like Jesus. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. The purpose of the teacher is also the purpose of the disciple. We are not the teacher; we are the disciples. We do not direct the mission, God directs the mission. God defines the mission. God determines the purpose of the mission. The mission belongs to God. Jesus is the one who builds the church. We are not free to develop our own mission when God has given us the parameters of his mission. The primary purpose of missions relates to God’s eternal purpose to bring everyone under the Lordship of Jesus. God asks of his followers (disciples) that we make more and more disciples. That is the mission!

Second, God is in control and he will take care of those who are involved in his mission.

The mission does not demand poverty, but the mission does demand sacrifice. Those involved in the mission travel light. The mission is accomplished by those who learn to depend on God. A person who is willingly involved in God’s mission develops a new set of priorities. A person who is “on mission” and is focused on God’s mission develops a new way of thinking about life in this world.

Third, our relationship with God is enhanced by our boldness in God’s mission.

As we declare him before others, he affirms that we are his. We become more confident in sharing the message. We find it easier and easier to follow Jesus. We acknowledge God; he acknowledges us. The disciple grows closer and closer to the Master.

Fourth, the result of God’s mission is not always love and joy and peace.

Sometimes the message of Jesus causes divisions. Mission demands establishing correct priorities. Mission demands that we focus on life beyond this world. Being on God’s mission will at times bring difficulties and challenges into our lives. Sometimes, the result is division and conflict.

Fifth, the messengers are God’s messengers.

Whether the message receives a positive response or is rejected, the messenger must not take it personally. The messenger always remembers that the mission is not about her or him. The mission is about God; the mission is about Jesus. Those who reject the message are not rejecting the messenger but are rejecting God.

Sixth, the reward is certain because God gives the reward.

God promises that faithful disciples who pursue the mission will not lose their reward. God rewards faithfulness. God blesses faithful servants; they will not lose their reward.