

## “Job”

Matthew 9:35 – 10:15

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It was a big job. It was a *really* big job. It was one of those jobs that just went on and on and on, with no rest for the weary, and no end in sight. There was, quite simply, more to do than any one person could possibly do.

It was time to enlist some help.

Now, of course, Jesus isn't your average Joe. Whether he felt overwhelmed by the magnitude of the job, I don't know. I kind of doubt it. He was traveling around from town to town – to “all the cities and villages,” the gospel tells us – doing three specific things. He was teaching in their synagogues. He was proclaiming the good news of God's kingdom. He was curing every disease and every sickness. That's *more* than a full-time job. We've seen glimpses of some of this already. Last week we heard about what he did for a woman suffering from a chronic medical condition, we heard about what he did for the man whose daughter had died, we heard about what he did for a man named Matthew, and we heard about how he was choosing to spend his time with those people with whom most of society didn't want anything to do. We caught glimpses of him “curing every disease and every sickness.” Now, the gospel is telling us that he is traveling around doing *three* things – teaching, proclaiming, and curing – and I gotta say, *that* was a big job. A *really* big job. It was one of those jobs that just went on and on and on, with no rest for the weary, and no end in sight. If it had been me – well, I think I would have been completely overwhelmed by it all.

Or maybe . . . maybe I would have decided to enlist some help. You know, *delegate*. Find some people to share the burden with. Create a few job descriptions. Conduct some interviews. Hire some folks – some good, reliable, trustworthy folks – who could help me do the job. Because I know that those jobs – teaching, proclaiming, curing – I know that those jobs are important. And I know that I can't do it all by myself. So maybe it's time to enlist some help.

Jesus writes no job descriptions. He holds no interviews. And the pay – well, from an economic standpoint, the pay was pretty lousy. Four of these guys had been *fishermen*. They caught fish and *sold* them, for a living. Jesus just came walking along the beach one day and said to them, “Hey, quit your job, and follow me.” And Matthew - he was that tax collector you heard about last week - he was making his own tidy little profit when Jesus just came walking up to his tax booth one day and said to

him, “Hey, quit your job, and follow me.” They leave their jobs behind and take up a *new* job – one that doesn’t pay any money. Jesus doesn’t *hire* these people. He *calls* them.

And so they come. Twelve of them. Twelve hand-picked men. Simon Peter. Andrew. James. John. Philip. Bartholomew. Thomas. Matthew. A second guy named James. Thaddaeus. Another Simon. And Judas. Twelve of them. He taps them all on the shoulder and says, “Here. I’ve got a job for you to do. The work is hard. The task is endless. And the pay is lousy. But it’s *God’s* work. It needs to be done. And you are just the people to do it.”

They come . . . and then they go. They go out. He sends them out. He tells them where to go, and he tells them what to do. “Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” “Proclaim the good news.” “Cure the sick.” “Raise the dead.” “Cleanse the lepers.” “Cast out demons.”

It was a big job. A *really* big job. A job that could just go on and on, with no rest for the weary, and with no end in sight. The work is hard. The task is endless. The pay is lousy. But it’s *God’s* work. It needed to be done. And they were just the people to do it.

I used to wonder why Jesus sends them only to their fellow Israelites. He makes it quite clear to them: don’t go to any of those Gentiles, and don’t go to any of those Samaritans. Just go to your *own* people. I used to wonder why. I mean, didn’t the Gentiles need God’s love as much as the Israelites? Didn’t the Samaritans need God’s mercy as much as the Jews? And why, later on, do things change? Why does Jesus restrict them now, and later on he removes all restrictions? I used to wonder about that, until I started to think about this story from the point of view of those disciples. Then I realized that Jesus was sending these people out on their very *first* job working for him. They didn’t have any experience doing any of this stuff – they were fishermen and tax collectors and ordinary people! Proclaiming the good news – curing the sick – raising the dead – cleansing the lepers – casting out demons. Did any one of these guys have *any* experience doing any of those things?

How would you feel if somebody tapped you on the shoulder and told you to quit your job - the one you knew how to do, the one that provided you with a decent income - to go off and do a job that you didn’t have *any* experience with, for no pay whatsoever? Wouldn’t that be a bit of a stretch?

I think Jesus is just saying, “Look. I’m giving you an important job to do. It’s a big job, a *really* big job, a job that could just go on and on, with no rest for the weary, and with no end in sight. But you don’t have to do it all. You can’t fix *everything* that’s wrong in the world. Just go to those places and to those people who are already familiar to you. Don’t worry about the rest. Not yet, at least. You just have to start *somewhere*.”

If this story were happening now, he might have said: “Think globally . . . act locally.”

So he sends them out. He sends them out to the people and the places that they were already familiar with. And he sends them out with a very simple job description: “Proclaim the good news.” “Cure the sick.” “Raise the dead.” “Cleanse the lepers.” “Cast out demons.” That’s it. Five simple tasks. That’s all. That’s all they have to do, at least for now. That’s all Jesus is asking them to do. That’s

all God wants them to do. “Proclaim the good news.” “Cure the sick.” “Raise the dead.” “Cleanse the lepers.” “Cast out demons.” Partner with God in the ongoing redemption of the world.

That’s their *job*.

Or, perhaps, I should say, that’s their *vocation*. That’s what God is *calling* them to do. It’s not something that they have been *prepared* for. It’s not the kind of life they ever imagined that they would lead. It’s not what they’ve always dreamed about doing ever since they were kids. No, they didn’t *choose* this path. This path chose *them*. They have been *called*; they have been *summoned*; they have been *invited* to leave the familiar comforts of life behind them and to stretch themselves in ways they never imagined they would be stretched, to become partners with God in helping to make a permanent, lasting, positive difference in the world around them.

They are *disciples*.

And that’s what disciples *do*.

Now, of course, they’re not going to do it all flawlessly. They’re not going to get it all right the first time they try. They are still human. They don’t fully understand the ways of God. They still have lots of questions. They still will make mistakes. Some of them will make some pretty serious mistakes later on. But, at least in principle, they understand: they’ve been given a *job* to do. They have been *called*. They have been *sent*.

And so, they *go*.

Because they are disciples.

And that’s what disciples *do*.

I don’t know if anyone ever told you this when you joined the church (if you’ve joined the church), because historically churches haven’t always been good about telling people this little detail. But when we join the church, we are saying to God and to our sisters and brothers in Christ that we are willing to offer our gifts and our talents and our skills and our services to partner with God in the ongoing redemption of the world. When we join the church, we’re not just joining a little club; we’re not just saying that we’ll show up for worship; we’re not just saying that we’ll give some money to help pay the bills. When we join the church, we’re saying something deeper than that. We’re saying that we’re willing to let Jesus tap us on the shoulder. We’re willing to be called; we’re willing to be summoned; we’re willing to be invited to leave the familiar comforts of life behind us and to stretch ourselves in ways we never imagined we would be stretched, to become partners with God in helping to make a permanent, lasting, positive difference in the world around us. When we join the church, we’re saying, “Okay, Jesus. We’re willing to follow you . . . wherever you lead us. We’re willing to go . . . wherever you send us.” We’re willing to take upon ourselves that mantle of discipleship.

That doesn’t mean we’re going to do it all flawlessly. We’re not going to get it all right the first time we try. We are still human. We don’t fully understand the ways of God. We still have lots of

questions. We still will make mistakes. We may even make some pretty serious mistakes later on. But, at least, in principle, we understand: we've been given a *job* to do. We have been *called* . . . and we are being *sent*.

"Proclaim the good news." "Cure the sick." "Raise the dead." "Cleanse the lepers." "Cast out demons." Partner with God in the ongoing redemption of the world. That was *their* job.

It's *our* job too.

And there are all sorts of ways we can do that. We can teach or tutor a child. We can learn medicinal arts. We can help out at a soup kitchen. We can visit people who can't get themselves out of their homes. We can minister to people in prison. We can teach nutrition. We can raise money and awareness to work for a cure for AIDS. We can house displaced refugees. We can record books for the blind. We can teach English as a second language. We can build houses for the poor. We can work to promote better relations between races. We can work to end poverty. We can teach art or creative writing. We can work on finding renewable and sustainable energy resources. We can help people come to grips with their addictions. We can do something about the fact that polar bears are now officially on the endangered species list. We can seek to find nonviolent ways to work out our difficulties with our neighbors near and far. We can reach out to those who are lonely or marginalized. We can engage in constructive dialogue with someone whose opinion differs from our own. We can provide shelter for the homeless. We can help people face their inner fears. We can partner with God in the ongoing redemption of the world. Who knows . . . maybe we could even cure the sick . . . raise the dead . . . cleanse the lepers . . . cast out demons. We could proclaim the good news.

I've been among you for little more than a month, but during that time, I can already see some of the ways in which you go out into the world, doing the work that God is calling you to do. Over the course of the past two days, a number of you were out doing the work that God has called you to do, raising money and awareness to help find a cure for cancer. In a week, a number of you will be out doing the work that God has called you to do, proclaiming the good news of God's love to a whole bunch of children. In two weeks, a number of our youth will be out doing the work that God has called them to do, fixing up a camp that serves disadvantaged children. The list goes on and on. When you do these things – or others like them – you are taking upon yourselves the mantle of discipleship. You are partnering with God in the ongoing redemption of the world.

But there's more yet to be done. Because it's a big job. It's a *really* big job. "Proclaim the good news." "Cure the sick." "Raise the dead." "Cleanse the lepers." "Cast out demons." It's a job that could just go on and on, with no rest for the weary, and no end in sight. The work can be hard. The task can be endless. The pay can be lousy. But it's *God's* work. It's work that needs to be done. It's work that you are already doing. And yet . . . and yet . . . there's always *more* that can yet be done.

May you joyfully continue to do the job that God is calling you to do.