**Zeal**

Matthew 10:1-14

As we finish our series on **the character of Jesus** we have two left: zeal today and humility next week. We started the series at Christmas time looking at the love, hope, peace and joy of Jesus.

| **The 13 Perfections of Jesus** | |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Love 2. Hope 3. Joy 4. Peace 5. Patience 6. Self-control | 1. Faithfulness 2. Wisdom 3. Goodness 4. Gentleness 5. Kindness 6. Zeal 7. Humility |

This series is an exercise in **applying the gospel** using four steps. First we look up at the perfect character of Jesus and are moved to worship and gratitude for who He is. Then we look down at ourselves to humbly and accurately assess how we are doing with each character quality. In the light of Jesus’ perfection, we all fall terribly short in every one!

But we don’t stop there, because there are ***13 expressions of the gospel*** like targeted medicine to treat us exactly at our point of need. And as we believe the gospel in all of its comprehensive power, **the Lord enables us to grow up in Him** - to take steps toward greater Christ-likeness in each of these amazing character qualities.

Our encouragement is to focus on one quality at a time - and to really work on it - like for 2-3 months apply the gospel to one issue, like concentrated doses of radiation and targeted antibiotics. Focus your Bible reading, prayer and encouragement from other believers on getting help to grow in that area.

***Zeal is the energy that drives self-control.*** Obviously what we all need is the perfect self-control of Jesus to live out all of His virtues all the time in every relationship. But we default to passivity and inaction. **We are all naturally not zealous** - at least not zealous for God and His priorities.

Oh, we can get all passionate and ***worked up about other things*** - sports, hobbies, money, vacation, that new smart phone or car… “Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.” Whatever you talk about the most and with the most passion and energy - that’s ZEAL. ***What are you zealous for?***

***Are we zealous for Jesus?*** Are we passionate about Him and His kingdom? Look at the heart of Jesus we saw a couple weeks ago in Matthew 9:

“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.’” Matthew 9:36-38

Jesus’ zeal for the Father’s glory, His passion to do the Father’s will, led Him to love people and become zealous for their needs. Let’s invite the heart of Jesus to stoke zeal in us today - to give us His passion, His conviction, His devotion and commitment! We will see **three practices that can move us from inaction to zealous ministry**.

**Moving from Apathetic inaction to passionate Ministry:**

* **Compassionate** Prayer

“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” Matthew 9:36

When Jesus looked at people He saw their hearts and their true need. We can only see what people let us see - so we don’t always perceive the hurt that is under the surface, or take the time to look closely. ***Jesus saw the reality and it broke his heart***. People are “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” People present themselves all strong and independent but the truth is all three of these descriptions are VULNERABLE, VULNERABLE, VULNERABLE.

But Jesus didn’t just point out the weaknesses and fears and brokenness of the people, He gave His disciples a simple assignment that would change their hearts too.

**Moving from Apathetic inaction to passionate Ministry:**

* **Compassionate** Prayer (9:36-38) connects us with the **Heart** of Jesus for hurting people

“Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” Matthew 9:38

Pray. Pray for people. But the specific prayer we are to pray is actually not for the people themselves, though we should do that too obviously. We are to pray for WORKERS to be sent out.

What is Jesus doing there? It’s actually not that subtle, is it?

***What happens when you pray for the harvest around you*** and ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into your neighborhood?

What happens when you pray for workers to be sent to **your family** members?

What happens when you pray for workers to be sent to **your co-workers**?

The vast majority of the time when the Lord leads you to pray that prayer, guess who is the answer to your prayer? YOU.

***But Jesus first needs to change our hearts*** so we are ready to be deployed into the harvest field. He wants us to see the desperate need out there and convince us it is real and urgent so we will pray about it. And as we pray He moves us to be a part of the solution.

* Think about **unreached** peoples around the world. 2 BILLION people have never heard the name of Jesus. That number is too big so think about 1.4 million of the Magiundanao in southern Philippines. 99.99% are Muslim. Less than one tenth of one percent are Christians. Over 1 million of those Philippinos will live their entire lives without any opportunity to hear about Jesus.
  + **Ask the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into that harvest field!**
* Think about the **40 million slaves** right now - more than ever in history - who are bought and sold entirely because of the depravity of people. Mostly girls and women, but also boys and young men are used, used up and then tossed aside.
  + **Ask the Lord of the harvest to send laborers to care for** those escaping from this terrible life!
* Think about the **800 children** in Tampa Bay who right now are awaiting placement in our foster system. 23 are placed every day and 23 new ones are taken from their homes every day.
  + **Ask the Lord of the harvest to send laborers to care for these precious children.**
* Think about the 68,217 women who had **abortions** in Florida last year. That’s 186 women in crisis every single day in our state alone.
  + **Ask the Lord of the harvest to send laborers to minister to those women** and care for the thousands who made the terrible choice to end the life of their baby and now have to live with that guilt and shame.

**Do you see the danger of praying these prayers?**

Jesus looks out at Tampa Bay and ***he has compassion for the addicts***, the mentally ill, the depressed teenagers, the ones with terminal cancer, the lonely people facing intense difficulty by themselves - and Jesus sees that they are harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Brothers and sisters, **we know the Shepherd**. The people around us don’t need to be sheep without a shepherd one day longer.

The first step to move from apathetic inaction to passionate ministry is to pray for the heart of Jesus. Follow His compassionate heart for people and pray the prayer he told us to pray - “ask therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” Second:

**Moving from Apathetic inaction to passionate Ministry:**

* Clear **Priorities**

“And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority…” Matthew 10:1

***Jesus was not vague or unclear about what he expected of his disciples.*** They traveled with him for over a year - watching him heal everyone who came, watching him cast out demons, watching him preach the kingdom of heaven. Then, at this turning point when the 12 disciples become the twelve apostles (look at verse 2) - they are sent out. That’s what apostle means - sent one; messenger.

***Are you and apostle?*** If you’re a Christian, guess what? You are. You are sent out. We are all sent ones - we are messengers of Jesus.

Does this verse sound familiar? It should! If you know the gospel of Matthew you probably know how it ends - with the **great commission** - “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me,” Jesus said. “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations.”

Those were some of Jesus’ last words to his disciples. And no doubt those words reminded them of these words in Matthew 10 - when they first received his authority and were sent out with His power and His message.

**Moving from Apathetic inaction to passionate Ministry:**

* Clear **Priorities** give us a bold **Focus** on disciplemaking

“Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. And proclaim… ‘the kingdom of heaven…’” Matthew 10:6-7

Jesus sent them out to heal as He had been healing people, to cast out demons as He had been casting out demons and to preach the good news of His kingdom. At this stage their focus, like that of Jesus, was the Jewish people. Paul retained this priority, as he wrote in Romans 1:16, ***“first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.”*** He always brought the gospel first to the Jewish synagogue in a town, and only when they rejected the message and chased him out did he go on to the marketplace or another public area.

Jesus knew His priorities. The apostles knew their priorities. Do you know YOUR priorities?

I think of the call to make disciples as **a bullseye**. There are just a couple of people in the center of your target, that you are most responsible to reach, love and train as followers of Jesus. If you’re married, your spouse is at the top of that list. If you have children, they are in the center of your bullseye. If you constantly lead strangers to Jesus and travel all over the world telling people about Jesus but you neglect your wife and children you are missing the point!

***Start with the people closest to you and work out from there.*** “Love your neighbor” is a very practical command. Who is your neighbor? Start with the people who live in your house. Then go to the people who live right next to your house - we call those people neighbors. What about the person who works right next to you? What about the student in your math class?

***Do you have a list of people you are praying for?*** Brainstorm 10-20 people you know who don’t know Jesus. Then ask the Lord of the harvest to help you prioritize the top 3. Start with them. Pray regularly for them. Ask the Lord for opportunities to share your story with them. Say, ***“Do you have a minute so I can share how Jesus changed my life?”***

Then share in 30-40 seconds - no more. Which means you better practice. Have that little speech ready; memorized. How has Jesus changed your life? Can you express it in 30 seconds?

We have collected a few examples to inspire you.

**[PLAY VIDEO with 30 second testimonies]**

For years I was addicted to approval and applause. I was a people pleaser who lived or died by the attention I got from teachers, friends - anyone. **But Jesus changed my life** when I realized I had GOD’s complete and eternal acceptance and approval. At the moment I gave my life to Jesus I became a child of God and He spoke these words over me - ‘You are my beloved son, with you I am well pleased.’ That set me free from the need to impress people, it filled me with peace and ***released me to serve people instead of serving myself!***

What’s your story? Who could you share it with this week?

***Are you ZEALOUS for the gospel?*** Do you LOVE to tell the story of Jesus and His love?

I’m not saying you have to be an extrovert to be a good Christian. I happen to be one so I know it comes across that way sometimes. But the habit of **keeping a prayer list** - that single discipline - corrects that misunderstanding. Every believer is responsible for SOMEONE. Every believer has a bullseye. Every one of us should have a list we are regularly praying for and reaching out to.

But just like we don’t mandate minutes per day in prayer, ***nor do we mandate how many people should be on your list***. You have to work that out with the Holy Spirit. Some people are called right now to spend more time in prayer. Some are called to spend more time meeting practical, physical needs. Some of you extroverts are called to share the gospel as boldly and frequently as possible. But all of us should HAVE A LIST and work the list.

Did you notice in verse 2 - **Jesus had a list?** Those twelve men were the ones Jesus unapologetically invested in, way more than anyone else on earth at the time. Way more. He spent nearly every minute of three years with just those twelve. Everyone else got a little of Jesus, from a distance, a sermon here, a miracle there. Then gone.

But the main reason, other than the Holy Spirit, that Christianity lives on today is those 12 men - really the 11, ‘cause Judas was a dud. From those 11 came a ripple effect of multiplying disciplemakers that has run through time to this very room in 2023.

The specific good works the Lord has prepared in advance for you to do varies with every believer. Those are **custom assignments**, no two the same. But every single Christian shares this same assignment: to make disciples.

**Moving from apathetic inaction to passionate ministry:**

* Clear **Priorities** give us a bold **Focus** on disciplemaking

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations…” Matthew 28:19

If you haven’t yet found that sweet spot of your ministry calling, go back to the fall series and review your Gifts, Passion and Story - your GPS. But you don’t have to start with some creative, specific ministry calling. ***The place to start is with making one disciple.*** It always starts with one. And I bet the Holy Spirit has already shown you who that one person is. That’s where you start.

If you send a text right now I will not be at all offended. As long as it’s about this. Don’t be making lunch plans.

***Compassionate prayer*** connects us with the heart of Jesus. ***Clear priorities*** give us a bold focus on disciplemaking. At the end of your life you will not stress out about the Netflix shows you never quite finished. You will not wring your hands in regret over that one seashell you never found or that one rare bird you never spotted or that one kind of fish you never landed. At the end of your life you will look back and evaluate the PEOPLE you poured yourself into.

Did you love them well? ***Did you give them the most important things*** - a love for God, a love for people? ZEAL for God and His kingdom?

One more practice to move from inertia to action, from apathy to zeal:

**Moving from Apathetic inaction to passionate Ministry:**

* Confident **Proclamation** shows and **Shares** the love of Christ

“Proclaim as you go, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers…” Matthew 10:7-8

Based on your list, your God given priorities, ***your calling is to be salt and light***. Bring the salt of God’s love and the light of God’s truth to the people around you. It always has to be both. Loving good deeds help us connect with people and prepare the soil of their hearts for the gospel seed. But only the actual words of the gospel, “Jesus died for you,” can change someone eternally.

Our calling is to ***both show and share the love of Jesus*** - both proclamation and demonstration of His love and lordship. Which is easier? Oh, it’s always easier and more comfortable to SHOW the love of Jesus and not talk about it. Both are skills and disciplines we need to grow in, practice and encourage each other in.

***Some of you are better at serving*** - at love and good deeds. ***Others of us are more about the talking.*** We need each other! We need to help each other, to work together and to learn from each other so the workers get better at talking and the talkers get better at working.

But as we show and share Jesus, ***we should be CONFIDENT***. First and primarily because Jesus has given us HIS own authority. We don’t share the gospel because WE think it’s a good idea. We share it because it is GOD’S good idea. We don’t love our neighbor because WE are so amazing - but because Jesus is so amazing, that He has loved us so well we can’t help but share His love with others.

Did you catch that phrase in verse 8? “Raise the dead.” ***Did the apostles go on to raise the dead?*** Yes. Acts documents two dramatic examples. Peter raised a faithful Christian woman from the dead. Paul raised a sleepy young man from the dead. Was that all Jesus intended when he sent out the 12? It would seem a little unnecessary to include here to the 12 if Peter was the only one who would eventually do it and then Paul (who wasn’t one of the 12) would also later pull it off. To me, the inclusion of “raise the dead” here is probably a double meaning. (10 resurrections in the Bible: https://record.adventistchurch.com/2017/04/12/the-ten-resurrections-in-the-bible-other-than-jesus/)

***Primarily it is figurative*** - every time you share the gospel with someone who responds, you are raising them from the dead spiritually. Of course, it’s not you doing it - it is God doing it as they respond in faith to the words of the gospel you have spoken.

But Christian history includes **documented cases** of people who have been raised from the dead through prayer. A 2019 CT article describes such examples from Irenaus and Augustine in the early church to John Wesley and recent days - including modern films like breakthrough with the young boy who fell through the ice.

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/june/miracles-resurrections-real-raisings-fake-news-keener-afric.html>

I’m not saying we should change our funeral practices and start commanding dead people to come forth like Lazarus. Our focus today is ZEAL. ***Are we so passionate for the glory of Jesus, so confident in HIM***, so consumed by His power and goodness and love, that we would join a desperate mother in praying for her lifeless son who was under water for 3 hours. Or the CT author’s niece who was bitten by a venomous snake and carried lifeless for 3 hours before being revived through prayer. Would our assumptions about miracles keep us from kneeling with that mother and praying desperately for life to re-enter her lifeless daughter?

***Do we have that kind of CONFIDENCE in King Jesus?***

The rest of Matthew 10 is a call to **fearless faith**. Jesus says in verse 16, “I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.” That is a crazy thing to do if you understand the relationship between sheep and wolves. But Jesus reassures them with comforting promises like verse 28:

**Moving from apathetic inaction to passionate ministry:**

* Confident **Proclamation** shows and **Shares** the love of Christ

“Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.” Matthew 10:28

He mentioned ***two sparrows sold for a penny***, “And not one of them falls to the ground apart from the Father,” aren’t you of greater worth than a sparrow? Fear not, Jesus tells us. Don’t be afraid of people who can only kill our bodies. We have eternal souls that cannot be touched by swords or guns.

This is a call to **persevere through every obstacle** - to keep showing and sharing the love of Jesus no matter what. Are we so zealous for the name of Jesus, the glory of our Lord and Savior that NOTHING can stop us from talking about Him?

Here’s our summary for today:

**Moving from Apathetic inaction to passionate Ministry:**

* Compassionate Prayer connects us with the heart of Jesus for hurting people
* Clear Priorities give us a bold focus on disciplemaking
* Confident Proclamation shows and shares the love of Christ

We are all zealots - the question is, **what are we zealous for**? Is it Jesus? Is it His kingdom? His priorities? Are we passionate about obeying the commands of Christ, such as the Great Commission?

If we will **pray and truly ask the Lord of the harvest** to send out workers into His harvest He will send us out. He will give us His heart, His zeal, His passion. We will see the people around us as they really are - harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

If we will ***really listen to God’s Word*** and study the teachings of Jesus with a commitment to be wise men who put His words into practice, it will help us prioritize our time and relationships and give us a bold focus on making disciples who make disciples.

And if ***we hold fast to the promises of God*** it will make us fearless and give us endurance to keep showing and sharing the love of Christ with the people around us, no matter what challenges or opposition we face.

So let’s apply the gospel:

| ↑ | Jesus was passionate about the Father’s **Glory** and devoted to the Father’s will |
| --- | --- |
| ↓ | We are often apathetic about God and His will, zealous mostly about the **World** |
| ❤ | Jesus calls us to pray for His harvest and sends us as His **Messengers** |
| → | As we grow in our passion for **Disciplemaking** we will become more fruitful |

First we look up and see ***the zeal of our Lord Jesus***. He was passionate about His Father’s glory, fully devoted to the Father’s will, aligning his entire life around the kingdom of God. Jesus was never apathetic, never sidetracked - but maintained His internal devotion of the heart and His external ministry to people.

By contrast, as we look down at ourselves, we see that **our zeal is so often misplaced**. While we know we should be most passionate about God and His will, we often let our hearts get more attached to the things of this world than to the things of God. We cultivate deep passions for our work and possessions, our hobbies and interests, while neglecting our time with the Lord, our Bible reading, prayer and ministry.

But Jesus meets us in our distraction and idolatry and performs **daily cleansing of the temple** to guide us back to a pure, single-minded commitment to God and God alone. This is why the command here is not immediately to GO but is first to PRAY for laborers. Jesus knows He must first change our hearts and prepare us. It’s the same with the commissioning in Acts 1 - Jesus first says WAIT. He says, “Stay in Jerusalem until you are clothed with power from on high.” As we grow in our worshipful dependence on the Lord and our zeal for Him and His kingdom, He sends us out as His workers into His harvest field.

And this means an increasing focus on and commitment to **making disciples** who make disciples. We are working hard at Oakwood to reorient everything we do around disciplemaking. That’s the main reason we spent this whole school year on character and calling - as part of our reorientation.

So where is the Lord sending you? What does your disciplemaking bullseye look like? Who are you praying for? Let’s take a few minutes now and ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest. And as we pray for zeal and passion for the Lord, let’s make ourselves available as the workers Jesus is preparing to send out!

Let’s pray.