

# The Church: A People who Give Freely

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## Text

Matthew 10:1-8

And when he had called unto *him* his twelve disciples, he gave them power *against* unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James *the son* of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James *the son* of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him. These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into *any* city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.

## Introduction:

Matthew 10 is generally referred to as the “Missionary Discourse”. It is the second of five sermons of Jesus that Matthew intersperses in his Gospel. Its historical occasion is the sending out of the disciples to carry out the preaching and healing ministry of Jesus. My intention in this study is not look at the details of the passage, but to examine, as a universal Christian principle, the last thing that Jesus says in the text that we have read: “freely ye have received, freely give.” I want to briefly look at its specific meaning as Jesus gave it to the twelve, and then examine it more as a general principle for all Christians.

### I. What it meant for the Twelve

In the strict context of what Jesus said to the twelve he meant that they were not to accept pay for their preaching. This is reflected in many translations. The ESV, for example translates it: “you have received without paying, give without paying.” This was a principle of the early church that the Gospel should be preached freely. Since it is the good news of God’s free gift of salvation, it should always be announced without cost. The Apostle Paul for example went to great lengths to make sure that he always followed this rule. He worked to support himself so

that no one could accuse him of announcing the Gospel for money. For example he writes to the Corinthians: “Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached God's gospel to you free of charge? I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you. And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way” (II Corinthians 11:7-9).

In the later New Testament some began to abuse this principle and the abuse became a problem in the churches. Paul addresses this problem in I Timothy when he warns Timothy of those who see “godliness as a source of gain”. This is what he says:

“If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness” (I Timothy 6:3-11).

That this continued to be a problem in the early church is evidenced by a passage in the *Didache* that gives instruction about traveling apostles and evangelists. It states:

“But concerning the apostles and prophets, so do ye according the the ordinance of the Gospel. Let every apostle, when he cometh to you, be received as the Lord; but he shall not abide more than a single day, or if there be need, a second likewise; but if he abide three days, he is a false prophet. And when he departeth let the apostle receive nothing save bread, until he findeth shelter; but if he ask for money, he is a false prophet. And any prophet speaking in the Spirit ye shall not try neither discern; for every sin shall be forgiven, but this sin shall not be forgiven. Yet not everyone that speaketh in the Spirit is a prophet, but he that hath the ways of the Lord. From his ways therefore the false prophet and the prophet shall be recognized. . .and whoever shall say in the Spirit give me silver or anything else, ye shall not listen to him; but if he tell you to give on behalf of others that are in want, let no man judge him” (*Didache*, xi).

Obviously such abuses continue to our times. All of us could cite examples, but be warned the gospel is not for sale, and those who make merchandise of it should be considered false prophets.

## II. What it Means for Us

However, my primary reason for examining this text is not to warn you against charlatans and false prophets; it is rather to clearly establish a foundational principle of our calling as Christ's disciples. Restated the principle is this: since God has freely poured out his blessings on us, we are to seek in every way possible to freely be a blessing to others.

Let me begin by reminding you that salvation is for us a free gift. It was bestowed upon us entirely by the Grace of God. We did nothing to deserve it. We received it freely. Let me make my point with two verses from Paul's Epistle to the Romans. First in 3:24 he tells us that we are "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Then in 8:32 he says: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Now these two verses cover life. We are freely justified, made right with God by the sacrifice of Christ, and all of God's blessings come to us freely. They are neither earned nor merited, and all that God expects of us, in return, is to extend the same grace to others that he has extended to us.

Nothing else identifies us with Christ like a generous spirit. God is gracious by nature; he gives freely, and we best exemplify the divine nature when we give in the same way. To give freely means to give expecting nothing in return; to give entirely for the good of the one receiving the gift and not for our own good. All people give, but many do not give freely. In fact giving freely is a fruit of grace, and the ability to do so is, itself, a gift of God, but nothing else so defines the church of Christ. We are a people who have received freely from God and who now freely give in his name.

Giving freely is, in fact, so unlike ordinary human behavior that when we do people often wonder why, or want to repay us in some way. This is because most human giving is done with the thought of securing some future benefit. This is the reason why anthropologists have discovered that one of the more complex elements of a culture is how they give and receive gifts. Missionaries have often been misled by gifts. From their own Christian perspective they have seen them as freely given only to discover at a future time that they were simply an investment. Unfortunately, it is not just non-Christians that have not understood the free gift. Christians are often guilty of giving with ulterior motives. It may be to get something from God, or it may be to get something from others, but, in either case, it is contrary to the Gospel. All

that we give should be given as God gives, graciously with the single motive of serving God and helping the recipient.

To learn to give freely is a great spiritual liberation. It frees us from at least two great enemies, anxiety and greed. Jesus was constantly warning people about both. For example, remember what he says in the Sermon on the Mount:

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great *is* that darkness! No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, *shall he* not much more *clothe* you, O ye of little faith? Therefore, take no thought, saying, what shall we eat? Or, What shall we drink? Or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day *is* the evil thereof” (Matthew 6:19-34).

So as God’s people, who have known the grace of God, who have received freely from him, let us give freely of our time, of our talent, and of our treasurer, knowing that when we do we are being like our heavenly Father who makes the rain to fall upon the just and upon the unjust. Let us give freely knowing that we are “not our own, but we have been bought with a price.” Let us give freely because it is the thing that defines us as children of a gracious Father, and because “it is more blessed to give than to receive.”

