

Article of the Month – February 2013

Missionary Aspects in the Gospels – Matthew (2)

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Matthew gives a model for short-term outreach.¹ Jesus sets boundaries to the apostles' ministry. In that we see the following key-elements: the *assignment* was: preach, heal and deliver; the *executives*: the twelve apostles; the *target area*: Israel, not yet Samaria or the Gentiles.² The *message* was that the Kingdom is near, proven by *miracles* of delivery, healing and raising the dead.³ The *method* was short-term, without long-term settlement preparations, but with instruction about how to deal with contacts and how to evaluate success or failure.⁴ The *accompanying effects* encompassed persecution, especially during later, long-term ministry;⁵ the ultimate reality of final vindication;⁶ separation lines within families⁷ and the reward.⁸ The time-frame is between 'then' and 'the end', *during* the tribulation *before* Jesus returns.⁹

When we look at the seven parables¹⁰ we see five Kingdom principles. The *first* parable is about sowing and reaping; the *second* about weeds that hinder the harvest; the *third and fourth* about extension, talking about the mustard seed and the yeast; the *fifth and sixth* about making a sacrifice for profit, speaking about the hidden treasure and the pearl; and the *last* about going out and gaining: the fish-net. Kingdom principles that are used here are sowing, planting, penetrating, trading and fishing. The one word they all have in common, is:

Growth! Matthew mentions six spiritual growth-catalysts: giving, prayer, fasting, tithing, sacrifice and persecution.¹¹ All these are attached to the word *when not if!* These six elements are not optional, but are being considered as signs of genuine discipleship.¹² On top of this Jesus sets higher standards than those in the Tenach: 'It was said ... but I tell you'.¹³ In the same line lies the *demand* for production and profit.¹⁴

¹ Matt. 10

² 10:1-8

³ Vs. 7,8

⁴ Vs. 9-15

⁵ Vs. 16-25

⁶ Vs. 16-33

⁷ Vs. 34-39

⁸ Vs. 40-42

⁹ Vs. 22,23a (italics mine). The return of Jesus is *preceded* (not followed) by persecution, suffered by His disciples who are on their mission of spreading the Gospel. There is no biblical argument that these disciples should be Jews only, neither that the place of outreach is limited to the country of Israel

¹⁰ Chapter 13

¹¹ 6:2,3; 6:5,60; 6:16,17 & 9:15; 23:23 & Luke 11:42; Matt. 10:37,38 & Luke 14:33; Matt. 5:11 & 10:19,33 & 21:36 respectively

¹² 13:44-46

¹³ 5:21-48

¹⁴ 25:14-30

Fleeing, impending arrest and death threats can be and often are part of missionary life.¹⁵

Missionary life can be very demanding. Look at Jesus' 24 hours non-stop ministry *in one chapter*, including mourning, political tension, teaching and feeding thousands, a night of prayer, saving a sinking disciple, calming the weather and meeting new crowds. Moreover, He trained His disciples to skip their sleep too!¹⁶

It is a Kingdom principle is to seek the lost, either the flock's, or outsiders.¹⁷

Jesus had to cleanse the Temple because it was meant as a house of prayer [for the nations].¹⁸ The same is true under the new covenant: the temple of the Holy Spirit must be clean in order to function for the salvation of the nations, whether in an individual or a church context.¹⁹

There were encounters with Gentiles. Although Jesus said that He was not sent to them but to the lost sheep of Israel, we see enough meetings with Gentiles that showed His interest, e.g. with the Roman Centurion and his great faith for healing; with the Gadarene demoniacs and how they were delivered; and with the Canaanite woman whose daughter received healing.²⁰ In the other Gospels we see more examples.

We also see some eschatological aspects in this Gospel, especially in its implications for workers.²¹ The words 'be ready' refer to works of faith, without which there is no proof of salvation. Works cannot save, but lack of them causes judgment.²²

Could Jesus have meant that part of the Great Commission is *not* going to be finished!²³

Questions are thrown at missionaries like 'Why not stay in your own country? The need is right here. There is plenty to do locally. Why go to a place where you have to do language study?' – and related questions. The answer is 'Only in his hometown is a prophet without honor'. Man seems to have less problems accepting truth from a stranger than from his own countrymen.²⁴ Is it coincidence that in Mark this 'home-criticism' is followed immediately by Jesus sending out the Twelve?²⁵

The climax of missiological content in Matthew is the Great Commission.²⁶ Here, the authority (Jesus), the assignment (go and make disciples), the area (all nations), the method (baptizing and teaching) and the presence (I am with you) together encompass the complete picture of World Evangelization.

¹⁵ See e.g. 2:13-20; 10:17-25; 12:14; 21:46; 22:6

¹⁶ Chapter 14

¹⁷ 18:10-14 & 22:9,10 respectively

¹⁸ 21:12,13 & Is. 56:7

¹⁹ 1 Cor. 6:19,20 & 3:9,16,17 respectively

²⁰ Matt. 8:5-13; 8:28-34 & 15:21-28 respectively

²¹ 24:42–25:46

²² James 2:14-16

²³ Matt. 10:23

²⁴ 13:54-57

²⁵ Mark 6:1-13

²⁶ Matt. 28:18-20

