

The Formation of Apostolic Laborers in the Book of Matthew

I. CONTENDING FOR AN APOSTOLIC MISSIONS MOVEMENT IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC

- A. Here in Tauranga we're laboring in the grace of God for the establishment of an organic community from which apostolic laborers could be formed and commissioned in the spirit and model of Antioch in Acts 13 that would contribute in a profound way to the completion of the Matthew 24:14 mandate to proclaim "the Gospel of the Kingdom" at the end of the age."

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers....² While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."³ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13:1-3)

- B. If I had to choose one book of the Bible to serve us as we labor for this vision of apostolic prayer and missions to come to maturity without doubt I'd choose Matthew. Matthew more than any other book of the Bible shows us the process of Biblical discipleship in accordance with "the Gospel of the Kingdom" that results in apostolic **formation** and **sending**. One of the clearest examples of this is how Matthew structures the narrative of Matthew 9-10.

35 And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, TEACHING in their synagogues and PROCLAIMING the gospel of the kingdom and HEALING every disease and every affliction. 36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; 38 therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to SEND OUT laborers into his harvest." And he CALLED to him his twelve disciples and GAVE THEM AUTHORITY over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and TO HEAL every disease and every affliction....⁵ These twelve Jesus SENT OUT, instructing them...(Matthew 9:35-38; 10:1, 5)

- C. The final two sentences of Matthew are what we call "the Great Commission." It's essential that we understand that **the process of formation** set forth in the previous 28 chapters is what enabled those 11 young adults to receive the commission and step into that which Jesus was calling them to. Without the process of formation in Matthew there would be no book of Acts.
- D. In the same way that God raised up a young adult prayer and missions movement in the first generation to begin the Great Commission after Jesus' first coming (the book of Acts) so also will He raise up a young adult prayer and missions movement to complete it before Jesus' second coming. And I believe that the book of Matthew is critical for us to understand as we labor.

II. AN OVERVIEW OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

- A. The book of Matthew can be divided in 3 primary parts:
1. The Years Before Jesus' Ministry (chapters 1:1-4:16)

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2. Jesus' Ministry in the North (chapters 4:17-16:20)
 3. Jesus' Ministry in the South (chapters 16:21-28:20)
- B. The three parts are divided by two transitional passages that Matthew clearly intended for us to understand as reference points to understand the narrative:
1. The transition from hiddenness into ministry in the north

FROM THAT TIME Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.".....**23** And he went throughout all Galilee, **teaching** in their synagogues and **proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction** among the people. **24** So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. **25** And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan. (Matthew 4:17, 23-25)
 2. The transition from ministry in the north into ministry in the south:

FROM THAT TIME Jesus began to show his disciples that **he must go to Jerusalem and suffer** many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. (Matthew 16:21)
- C. Both of these transitions were accompanied by the Father's declaration of love and delight in His Son. This is important for us to connect with.
1. Before His ministry in the north:

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him.... **16** And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; **17** and behold, **a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."** (Matthew 3:13-17)
 2. Before His descent into Jerusalem:

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. **2** And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. **3** And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. **4** And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." **5** He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, **"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."** (Matthew 17:1-5)
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III. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JESUS' BAPTISM IN THE GOSPEL NARRATIVE AND IT'S RELEVANCE TO US

A. One of the most significant events in the Gospel of Matthew was Jesus' baptism in the Jordan. It was this event that set in motion the next 3 1/2 years that ultimately culminated in Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.

B. We should view this event as central to how God raises up apostolic laborers. Jesus is the premier model of a son and an apostle:

...consider Jesus, the apostle...who was faithful to him who appointed him... (Hebrews 3:1-2)

...that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. (John 17:23)

C. In the waters of the Jordan Jesus received the affirmation of His Father that would thrust Him into the wilderness for His confrontation with Satan and His 3 1/2 year ministry.

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him.... 16 And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; 17 and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:13-17)

D. Immediately after this Jesus is led "by the Spirit" into a confrontation with Satan:

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 And the tempter came... (Matthew 4:1-2)

E. The next series of events is that Jesus moves to Galilee in the north where he **begins preaching** (4:12-17), **calls Peter, James and John** (4:18-22) and begins **declaring and demonstrating the Gospel of the Kingdom** (4:23-25).

F. Here is the relevance of Matthew 3-4 for us. We are on the verge of witnessing the raising up of a missions movement that will far surpass the book of Acts in scope, magnitude, authority, power and impact. And we will soon witness the greatest historical confrontation with Satan the earth has ever known (Rev. 12:7; ch. 13). And as it was for Jesus our engagement in missions and our victory over the evil one must be the fruit of our revelation of the glad heart of our Father who loves us.

G. As we begin another year and a new season in Tauranga I want to call us to encounter the Father again. As it was for Jesus, so it will be for us: apostolic sending is preceded by the revelation of sonship.

H. **Victory over Satan** (Matt. 4:1-11) & **demonstration of the Gospel of the Kingdom** (Matt. 4:23) is preceded by **revelation of being "Beloved"** (Matt. 3:17). It's not that we choose one over the other. We want all three. But we must understand the difference between "root" and "fruit;" victory and impact are the fruit of being rooted and grounded in the revelation of our Belovedness as sons before God our Father.