

“Traveling Light”

Mark 6:7-13, 30

⁷ And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸ He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belts—⁹ but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics. ¹⁰ And he said to them, “Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you depart from there. ¹¹ And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” ¹² So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent. ¹³ And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them. ³⁰ The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. (ESV)

If you’ve been here the past couple of months, we’ve been looking at the gospel of Mark. As we looked at the gospel of Mark, if you remember, I’ve said it’s almost like riding bumper cars. Mark sort of bumps from one thing to the other, it seems. Up to this point we’ve seen Jesus rejected a number of times. By the beginning of chapter three we saw that Jesus was rejected by the religious leaders - by the Pharisees and scribes and Herodians. Then we saw Jesus ultimately rejected by His own family. They thought He was crazy. Last week we looked at the fact that Jesus was rejected by His own hometown. In His own hometown He was unable to perform many miracles there, it said, because they did not believe in Him – they had no faith. What’s interesting is that before these times of rejection you also see Jesus having great times of success. In chapters four, five and six, Jesus exercises His authority in four different ways at least. I told you He’s like “The Dog Whisperer.” Just yesterday I was watching “The Dog Whisperer,” and as Judy walked in, a bullmastiff was coming at him and he went, “Pssst,” and the thing just cowered in front of him. I put it on pause and looked at my wife and said, “I love Cesar.” Cesar can halt dogs with his authority. Jesus can halt the wind and the waves, we learned. Not only can Jesus halt the wind and the waves, but Jesus was able to cast out two thousand demons from one individual. Last week we looked at Jesus healing a woman who had been sick for twelve years; He had authority over disease. And He also raised a little girl from the dead. He had authority even over death. Then He sent to His hometown and experienced very little success. In fact some might call it a failure. It’s interesting: if you were Jesus and you had authority over all this stuff and then you just experienced failure, what would you do? Usually most of us would think, “Well, I’m going to go with something I know and get some more success under my belt, and then I’ll head back out to the mission field.” What does Jesus do? Instead, at the moment when He seems to have failed, He takes twelve individuals who have impeded Him up to this point, they’ve misunderstood Him up to this point, they’ve tried to stop Him up to this point, and they certainly don’t seem to know what’s going on. He takes them and sends them out on their own mission. That probably isn’t what I would have done. The question is, “Why would Jesus send people who don’t really get it out to preach the gospel? Why would He send people who sometimes understand, sometimes don’t, sometimes are faithful, sometimes are not?” The answer is because that’s the way He always does it. He did that with the disciples, He’s done that with the church for the past two thousand years, and He does it with us even now. So the question is, “What does it mean for us to do what they have been charged to do here?”

We’re going to look at three things this morning as we look at this text. Jesus tells the disciples what to take, He tells them what to do, and finally He tells the disciples what to expect on this mission trip. So the first thing we’ll look at is what they should take.

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Just as a little context, remember that Jesus in chapter three called the twelve unto Himself, but He didn’t just call them unto Himself, He called them for a purpose. That’s something we as Christians today need to hear as well. Remember, He called the twelve unto Himself for two reasons. The first

reason is that they might be with Him – that they may be with Him to learn from Him, that He might disciple them, tutor them, teach them, and train them for ministry. But also He called them that He might send them out to preach. In other words, He brought them in that He might send them out. He gathered them in order to grow them, in order to send them out to gather and serve themselves. Does that sound familiar to you? The vision of our church is, “Every member gathering, growing, serving, and going,” and that’s exactly what we see here. When Jesus calls them unto Himself, He calls them with a purpose. Certainly He saves them from their sins, He saves us from our sins, but He does not call us simply to grow. If a Martian came from outer space and you told him, “Just look at a church, any church (let’s just say ours, for example). Look at this church for a month and at the end of it I want you to evaluate what these people think is important, Gathering, Growing, Serving, or Going?” In most churches it would be growing. Why would he think that? It’s because you see people sitting in Sunday school, in places like BSF, in Bible study, in all these kinds of things, and constantly saying, “I need more knowledge in order to grow.” All those things, by the way, are great things, but at some point you’ve got to *go*. At some point you have to be a gatherer yourself. If you’re only growing, if you’re only taking in information and you’re only benefiting, you’re not actually going to end up really growing. Unless you’re trying to gather you can’t grow as well. One of the big questions in this text is, “Why did Jesus send these men out?” Did He send them out for the sake of the people to whom they would preach, or did He send them out for their own training?” I think it was both, but in reality it was mostly for their own growth. In order to grow them He made them into gatherers. That’s why He called them unto Himself. Then what did He tell them to take with them? It’s easy to skip over the most important things He told them to take because it’s not so obvious. The first thing he tells them to take,

⁷ *And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two . . . (ESV)*

The first thing He told them to take with them was a buddy, a ministry partner. Why did He tell them to go out two by two? Wouldn’t it be better if He’d sent them out one at a time? Then His ministry surface area would have been doubled. He would have had twelve people out doing the job. Instead He sent them out two by two. Why? There are some practical reasons for that, there are some theological reasons for that, there are even some legal reasons for that. What’s the practical reason? It was safer to go two by two. And, there was the issue of companionship – you might not get lonely. What’s the theological reason? You need someone not just to preach with, but you need someone who will preach to you. Two by two, they’re going out together and from time to time I’m guessing that one or the other would have to preach to the other one, “We need to keep going. We can’t give up now.” They were there to encourage one another. When I was in Ranger school, on the first day the very first thing they do to you is pick lots and assign you a Ranger buddy. Your Ranger buddy is an individual whom you are not allowed to be out of arm reach from for fifty-eight days. You’re not allowed to leave that person’s side. Fortunately for me, I don’t know that it’s ever happened before, but I went with another person from my platoon named John Craft, and in this lottery, this random choosing, the one person that was assigned to be my Ranger Buddy was someone who was my buddy before I went. They almost separated us because they thought that was so bizarre. But Craft and I stayed together. Why was it important to have a Ranger buddy? You don’t know until the end. You think, “Why are they making a big deal about this?” At the end I realized that if it weren’t for Craft I wouldn’t have graduated Ranger school. And if weren’t for me, Craft wouldn’t have either. You see, Craft had gotten married a few months before he knew he was going to Ranger school. His wife was pregnant. When you’re out in the woods there are not a lot of phones, and there were times where he said, “I’m just going to quit! I can’t take this anymore! I need to find out how my wife is doing. I need to call her. I need to see how the pregnancy is going. I need to go, Allen.” He could spin out of control, and I’d go [pretending to slap him], “Craft, shut up. Snap back to it. You know, we have thirty more days. After thirty more days you can do anything you want, but until then you have to just zip it.” All you have to do to quit is go up and tell them you quit and you’re out. Now lest you think that I didn’t have my issues, my particular issues had to do with hypothermia. There were a couple times where I was doing

what we called, "the kickin' chicken." You just couldn't move. Craft would wrap me up in his rain poncho and he'd slap me around and say, "Allen, you're not quittin'." That's why Jesus sends these guys out two by two, I think. There had to be times when they're facing rejection, when they're facing persecution, when they're facing hardship, and they needed to preach the gospel to each other. If you're a Christian here today you need someone like that in your life, or many people like that in your life. I think one of the things that encourages my wife more than anything else is how many men there are in this church who are willing to take care of me, who are willing to ask me hard questions, who are willing to encourage me. Do you have someone like that?

We have a Session retreat every year, and this year we determined that what we need to do is emphasize two things in our church, and really only those two things. One is worship and one is small groups. The reason for the small groups angle is because you need people who are walking along with you. That can be a men's group, it can be a women's group, it can be a couples group, it can be a knitting group, but the question is, "Are you in some kind of group integrating and interfacing with other Christians – people who can help keep you on the road, people who can help keep you moving forward?" If you're not, I ask you to tell someone at the Welcome Center and we will do everything we can to get you into a group. Maybe you're thinking, "I don't know if that's good for me right now. I don't know if I need it." One of the saddest things for me as a pastor, and it happens more often than I'd like, is when people come to me and their marriage is breaking up or they have some major issues in their life, and you can almost read a script. The first question you ask when someone comes and says, "Our marriage is falling apart," is, "Are you connected with anyone else in the church?" One hundred percent of the time, the answer is, "Nyeah, not really." "Are you in a men's group or women's group?" "Nope." Usually they're completely disconnected, there's no one in their life who can ask them how their marriage is going. Then it goes on like that for years and years and years, and by ten years later it's almost too late outside of the gospel doing major work, which it does sometimes. But don't think you're above being in some small group in some kind of partnering context. You need it. So, the first thing Jesus told them to take with them was a Ranger buddy, if you will. They went out two by two.

What's the second thing He told them to take? Take His authority. But not only His authority, it was His authority to do something. It was basically His authority that would give them the ability to do deeds of mercy. You look at the end of this text and it says they did three things. They preached repentance and they cast out demons and they healed many diseases by anointing people with oil. Jesus doesn't just send them out to preach, but He sends them out to preach and do deeds of mercy. When you look at the New Testament, preaching and deeds of mercy go hand-in-hand. In fact, they almost can't be separated. The error that many people make is that they think, "I'm just responsible for preaching the gospel to somebody. I put the truth out there and if it takes, it takes. If it doesn't, it doesn't. It's up to people if they don't get it." Other people say, "We're just here to be the hands and feet of Christ. We're just here to serve people and hopefully, eventually one day they'll get it." Well, both of those extremes are wrong. We need to preach, we need to tell people about Jesus on one hand, but we also need to serve people on behalf of Jesus. We also need to do deeds of mercy. You hear me rave about our deacons here all the time, and I mean all that, but the question for the rest of us is: How are we serving? We have a serving team that's actually working as well to provide opportunities for us to provide deeds as well as words. It struck me how important that was when I was in Ethiopia and we would go to home visit. There was one part were several days in a row I had to go visit support groups. These are people who are HIV positive and on drugs, and they support one another. Almost none of them are Christian. Most of them are Muslim, as a matter of fact, or "orthodox Christians" (which they say are not). I remember one day going in and discussing meds with a bunch of women and a few men. We're saying, "How are you doing? Are there any issues you need to talk through?" You're basically taking care of them. "How are your medicines working?" Then I said, "OK, good. Nice being with you guys." We started to take off and the translator said, "Tommy, please stop." You have to love translators who are willing to tell it like it is. I said, "Yeah?" Her name was Oliff. She said, "I think you should tell them about eternal life now." I said, "Okay. Um. Okay.

Everybody sit back down." I asked them, "How do you know that God will accept you into heaven." We went around the room, and fifteen people said, "Good works. Good works. Good works. Good works. Good works. Good works. Good works. Good works." I said, "Okay. Now, how many of you guys think you're actually good enough to do that?" Crickets. Crickets. Crickets. Crickets. Crickets. Nothing. We ended up having an unbelievable conversation about the gospel, that it's free, that Jesus offers forgiveness to anyone who would receive it. In fact, "You guys think that because you have HIV and AIDS, that you're the most outcast there are?" (You know what I'm going to say to them.) "When Jesus was here He didn't pursue the good people, He didn't pursue the religious people, He pursued the people who were the very worst, and the people with all kinds of diseases like HIV, for example." Now, I don't know how they're going to respond to that ultimately, but I was reminded that deeds need to be accompanied by words as much as words need to be accompanied by deeds, and that's what Jesus told them to do. That's what Jesus told them to take. What else did He tell them to take? It's interesting.

⁸ *He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belts—⁹ but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics. (ESV)*

So what does He tell them to take? Nothing. I mean nothing except the barest essentials. Why is this? On one hand there's no question that He's doing that to teach them a lesson. He's doing it to help them understand that they need to trust Him, that everything they need for their mission He will provide. But I think something else is going on here as well, because the same things that Jesus tells His disciples to take are the same things that God tells Moses and Israel to take during the Exodus of Egypt. Basically, cloak, belt, sandals, and staff, that's it. Exodus 12:11, I believe, if you want to check me on that. Why would God tell them, "When you leave Egypt toward the Promised Land, I only want you to take these four things - cloak, belt, sandals, and staff"? The answer's pretty simple. It's because when you're heading from Egypt to the Promised Land, you don't need anything else bogging you down. The easiest way to get from point A to point B is to travel light, and that's what Jesus is telling them to do as well. That's the question for us, as well. This mission here is specifically for the disciples. It's described, it's not prescribed. He's not telling us that we have to do these things, but the question arises from this text. As we seek to serve Jesus are you traveling light? In other words, do you have too much stuff? As a rule if you live in the United States you probably do, but the question is, "What are you doing with your stuff, and is your stuff keeping you from pursuing the mission that Jesus has given you and the calling Jesus has given you, or is it helping you?" When you look at the Bible, the Bible does not have anything negative to say about wealth or great wealth in and of itself. What the Bible has talked negatively about is the way we tend to use wealth and what wealth tends to do to us. So having wealth and using wealth is actually a great blessing and it's not a bad thing, but the question is, "Are you using what God has given you for the sake of the mission he's called you to participate in, or are you not?" Are you just accumulating stuff? Does the stuff get to a point where it actually kills you, where it actually crushes you? Do you remember Madame Blueberry from "Veggie Tales"? She has pictures in her house of all the stuff that she wishes she could have and then right across the street from her house a Stuff Mart is built. That's what my family calls Fred Meyer ever since we watched that show. Representatives from Stuff Mart come over to her house and convince her how much stuff she needs, and she fills up her tree house with stuff to such extent eventually her tree house just falls over and breaks. Is your tree house ready to break? At what point do you have enough stuff, and at what point do you need to travel a little bit lighter? Jesus tells the disciples in this mission, "Travel light because by traveling light you've got to trust in Me, and by traveling light you're able to move quicker and do more things."

After He tells them what to take, or not to take really, He tells them what they should do. Look at verses 10 and 11.

¹⁰ *And he said to them, "Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you depart from there. ¹¹ And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." (ESV)*

It's interesting how much the issue of money and wealth comes up in this text. When Jesus tells them, "When you go to a village and you stay with somebody, stay there." What is Jesus telling them to do there? He's actually encouraging them to be content. In the ancient near east it was an obligation when you came into a town for people to show you hospitality. Let's just imagine a scenario. You come into a town, you're a disciple, and someone who has a one-bedroom shack with no television and no running water asks, "Do you guys want to stay with us?" And at the time you have no other options, so you say, "Well, sure. Thank you for the hospitality." The next day you're preaching and after the service someone comes up to you and says, "Hey, man. We have six bedrooms, widescreen TV, and an Olympic-sized pool. Do you want to stay with us?" What would you be tempted to say? I would be tempted to say, "Of course I'd rather stay there." Jesus says, "Whenever you go some place and you're taken in, stay in that place." What does it do? For one it confirms that there's a relationship there and you're not just using people in order to see the gospel spread. They're helping you to see the gospel spread, but at the end of the day you care about them because you're content. "I'd just as soon stay here with you with the one-bedroom place as I would with the person with the big place. I'm willing to be content." Imagine what the people would think if you did that. If the day after you took meager housing you took an offer from someone with great housing, well don't you think rumors would begin to spread about you that all you really care about is using people? That's what philosophers did in those days, and Jesus says, "You don't do that. Wherever you go and you get put up, you stay put" - on one hand. On the other hand, if no one will receive you He says, "When you leave that place, shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them." That gets back to the beginning. Remember I said Jesus sent people two by two and there's even a legal aspect to that? In book of Deuteronomy there are several places where it talks about the testimony of two witnesses being required to make a case in court. Two witnesses either to accuse someone of something, or two witnesses in order to defend something, but there needs to be testimony given. Jesus says, "For a village that won't receive you, there's two of you so that counts, here's what I want you to do as a testimony against them." I'll read it to you again.

¹¹ *And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.* (ESV)

In the Ancient Near East, apparently when a faithful Jew would leave the Promised Land, when he would leave Israel to go to the Gentile territory and come back home, before he actually set foot back in Israel (set foot back in the Promised Land) he would stop and shake the dust off his feet and his clothing as a symbol of shaking off the sort of Gentile pollution and sin of the world before he entered back into the Promised Land. Why is that important here? Did you notice that the villages the disciples are preaching at are all Jewish villages? They're not preaching to Gentiles. What Jesus is saying here is that, "What's important here is not whether you are ethnic Israel or not, what is important here is what you do with Me." The same applies to us. What is important is not whether you're Presbyterian or Methodist or Episcopal or Catholic or Baptist or anything else. What is important is what you do with Jesus. Have you trusted Him for the forgiveness of sins? At the end of the day there are people who have trusted Jesus for the forgiveness of sins and there are people who remain in their sin. Jesus says that those who remain in their sin will have testimony against them. In this particular case it's the disciples shaking the dust off their feet. That's pretty big. We saw what they should take, we saw what they should do, now what should they expect when they go?

¹² *So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent.* ¹³ *And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.*

³⁰ *The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught.* (ESV)

What should they expect? The first thing they should expect is some level of success. It says here they had success. They went and preached that people should repent. They cast out demons successfully. They healed many people successfully. If you're doing gospel ministry and you're genuinely preaching the gospel, you should expect and experience some successes. If you never experience any successes when you're engaging in some kind of gospel ministry, the question is, "Are you really engaging in gospel ministry? Are you really preaching the gospel to people?" I've been a pastor now for fifteen years or so, and you often meet pastors who have preached for twenty, thirty, forty years and have not had any success, no one has come to know Jesus, and they say, "I'm just being faithful." You know, Jesus wants us to be faithful but if you're never having any success you ought to re-evaluate, "What is it that I am really believing and teaching and preaching and talking to people about?" The same for a layperson. Do you have any success in your life? Have you ever invited a neighbor to church and seen that neighbor's heart changed by the gospel? Have you ever served somebody as a deacon? I'm guessing if you're a deacon you have by definition. But have you ever served somebody and seen their life changed as a result of that? If you're really doing gospel ministry you should expect some successes.

But then, in this passage at least, there's a big elephant in the room. The elephant in the room is that you should also expect some failures. Nothing's easy. That's gospel truth. I say that all the time, but it's true. What's the elephant in the room in this text? Did anyone wonder as I was reading through this text why I read verses 7 through 13 and then skipped down to 30? The elephant in the room, in this text, is the death and martyrdom of John the Baptist. Remember, Mark is fond of making sandwiches. Earlier we saw that Mark made a sandwich between Jesus' family and the religious leaders. You see Jesus reacting and responding to his family, then the religious leaders accuse him and then his family is the other slice of bread, if you will. Last week we looked at the little girl who was ill and Mark made a sandwich of the lady who was sick by putting the little girl who was ill on either side of the story. In this story the sandwich is just the disciples going out and the disciples coming back, and what is sandwiched in between? It's the death and martyrdom of John the Baptist. What is the point there? Why did Mark do that? One reason is that you should expect some failures in ministry and some successes – that when you really engage in gospel ministry, when you're really gathering and growing and serving, that sometimes things are going to go great and sometimes things are going to go wonderfully, and other times they're going to go catastrophically bad. The question is whether or not it's worth it. Is it worth it to risk things going catastrophically bad in order to have things go catastrophically good, if you will – to have the joy of seeing people come to Christ, to have the joy of seeing people healed, to have the joy of doing all these things. You can only answer that for yourself. I'm afraid many Christians at least never take the risk because they're afraid of failure, they're afraid of not doing something right, so they never experience the blessing that comes from this. What we don't understand as well is when we try, when we engage in ministry, that we only see things from our perspective. We don't see things from God's perspective.

"The Rookie" is one of my family's favorite movies. We've seen it too many times to mention here. Dennis Quaid plays the lead in a true story of an aging high school coach who used to be a great pitcher. He pitches batting practice for his kids and he throws pretty hard, and the kids say, "You ought to try out. You ought to do professional baseball tryouts." I believe he plays for the Tampa Bay Devil Rays, eventually. He says, "Oh, no, no, no, no, no. I can't do that." Then late one night he drives his truck out on the highway where there's one of those signs that tells you how fast you're going when you speed - it flashes your speed up there. He waits until all the cars go by and he gets out his glove and his ball and he hurls it toward that sign and it says, "76 m.p.h." You have to be at least 90 to make it into the pros. It says, "76 m.p.h.," and as soon as he turns his back and hangs his head and starts to walk away it starts to flicker and the sign changes to "96 m.p.h.," and you know that he's got potential to do anything. From his perspective he's through - nothing happened. The only way you can know is to try out. The only way you can know whether God has gifted you with regard to ministry and gifted you in different areas is to do it. It's to serve; it's to engage in ministry. The question is, "Will you?"