

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Besides being the sacrifice for sin, Jesus Christ was anointed by God the Father to preach the Gospel:

LUKE 4:18 “The Spirit of the LORD *is* upon Me [*Jesus Christ*], because **He [God] has anointed Me to preach the gospel** ...

After His trial by Satan in the southern Judean wilderness, Jesus began to call disciples as He journeyed north toward Jerusalem. During His ministry, Jesus preached the Gospel throughout the vast majority of Israel in His extensive travels. The places He visited included Mount Hermon near Damascus, Caesarea Philippi, Tyre and Sidon, the region around the Sea of Galilee (Bethsaida, Chorazin, Capernaum, Gadarenes, Gennesaret, Magadan, and Decapolis), Cana, Nazareth, Mount Tabor, Sychar, Ephraim, Emmaus, Jerusalem and the surrounding towns (Gabbatha, Bethphage, Mount of Olives, Bethany), Bethlehem, Jericho, and the southern Jordan River area. As He went about teaching and preaching, Jesus was accompanied by the disciples (Mark 6:1).

Who were these disciples? It might seem obvious but there were more disciples than one might think. The twelve disciples are well-known because they became apostles. Some were invited to become disciples but did not follow through (Matt. 8:19-22, et al). The Bible does not give a sense of the number of disciples but Scripture affirms that there were many<sup>1</sup>. Aside from the twelve there were at least 70 others. Around 20 or so disciples are named such as Lazarus, Mary Magdalene, Silas, Apollos, Martha, and Joseph of Arimathea. Often when disciples are mentioned in Scripture it is uncertain if it refers to the twelve or others, and that could be a few or many. But many disciples were involved in preaching the Gospel. The first recorded Gospel mission was undertaken by the twelve:

MATTHEW 10:5-6 These twelve [*disciples*] Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: “Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. 6 “But **go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.**

LUKE 9:2-6 He [*Jesus Christ*] sent them to **preach the [Gospel of the] kingdom of God** and to heal the sick. 3 And He said to them, “Take nothing for **the journey [to the house of Israel]**, neither staffs nor bag nor bread nor money; and do not have two tunics apiece. 4 “Whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. 5 “And whoever will not receive you, when you go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet as a testimony against them.” 6 So they departed and **went through the towns [of house of Israel], preaching the gospel** and healing everywhere.

The twelve apostles did not go to a few local towns in the land of Israel. They went to the ‘Lost’ Ten Tribes in the regions around the Black and Caspian Seas. This was a long journey of months, which is why it is shocking that Jesus did not allow them to bring any provisions. Short journeys did not require preparations because there were many towns close by; however, it was unheard of to go on a long, arduous, and perilous trek of hundreds of miles completely unprepared. In fact, their journey took them farther than

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 2:15.

Haran in Turkey, where Abram lived before journeying to Canaan. About the same time, Jesus sent 70 other disciples out to preach the Gospel:

LUKE 10:1, 3-9 After these things **the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go.** ... 3 “Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves. 4 “Carry neither money bag, knapsack, nor sandals; and greet no one along the road. 5 “But whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ 6 “And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on it; if not, it will return to you. 7 “And remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give, for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not go from house to house. 8 “Whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you. 9 “And heal the sick there, and say to them, **‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’**

Jesus was traveling north toward Jerusalem at this time and the 70 disciples were sent to prepare the towns and villages for His imminent arrival by proclaiming “the kingdom of God **has come near**”. Because the Gospel was preached to all of Israel and the Ten Tribes, many thousands of people became disciples of Jesus<sup>2</sup>. But shortly before His ascension, Jesus gave the eleven disciples (excluding Judas Iscariot) a new mission:

MARK 16:14-15 Later He [*Jesus Christ*] appeared to **the eleven** as they sat at the table; ... 15 And He said to them, **“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”**

The magnitude of this surely was not lost on the disciples. They were to **“Go into all the world”** and there is no indication that they were aided by others nor was this the beginning of a work—history records that the apostles THEMSELVES traveled the world. After replacing Judas Iscariot with Matthias and the conversion of Paul there were thirteen apostles. Still, how could so few cover the entire world? Notice also this astonishing statement from Paul years later:

COLOSSIANS 1:23 ... **the gospel** which you heard, **which was preached to every creature under heaven**, of which I, Paul, became a minister.

It is generally believed Paul wrote this around 62 AD. It was certainly not much later because Paul was martyred around 67 AD. What a stunning achievement by a few men to preach the Gospel to “every creature under heaven” a short 30 years or so after Jesus ascended to heaven. But this they did. History records that they spread the Gospel to North Africa, Ethiopia, the Arabian Peninsula, Asia Minor, extensive regions in and around the Black and Caspian Seas and eastward to Kazakhstan and India, southern Europe, and Britain. Vast numbers were converted to Christianity on a scale not appreciated in modern times. But there is another reason, aside from salvation, for preaching the Gospel:

MATTHEW 24:14 “And **this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world** as a witness to all the nations, **and then the end will come.**

The Gospel is also a WITNESS, something that precedes the rendering of a judgment by God, and the timing here is just prior to the END OF THE AGE. Since the end-times are only a few years, it was not an assignment for the apostles nor a commission to the general *ekklesia*. It is also unlikely that this could even be done by the *ekklesia* today since it is hard to imagine any groups of Christians uniting together for this purpose in a

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<sup>2</sup> Matt. 14:13-21 (5,000 near Bethsaida); 15:32-38 (4,000 near Decapolis).

short time. Therefore, it seems more likely it will be fulfilled by the second of the Three Angels during the Seventh Trumpet:

REVELATION 14:6-7 Then I [*John*] saw another **angel** flying in the midst of heaven, **having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people**— 7 saying with a loud voice, “Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of **His judgment has come**; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.”

The primary command to the disciples before Jesus ascended to heaven was to preach a Gospel of **salvation**:

MARK 16:15-16 And He [*Jesus Christ*] said to them [*the eleven*], “Go into all the world and **preach the gospel** to every creature. 16 “**He who believes** and is baptized **will be saved**; but he who does not believe will be condemned.

One would hope that once the Gospel is received, people would remain faithful and pass it along to succeeding generations. However, persecution, martyrdom, and other various factors cause people to fall away (i.e., The Sower—Matt. 13:3-9, 18-23) and the Gospel message is lost over time. There will always be a need to preach the Gospel and the *ekklesia*, as disciples of Christ, have an important role in spreading it. Jesus sent many disciples to preach the Gospel aside from the twelve who were apostles. A *disciple* is simply a pupil or student. Even though Jesus gave the 70 power to heal and cast out demons, they were not apostles or ordained. They were simply dedicated believers and followers. All who follow Jesus **are** DISCIPLES<sup>3</sup> so the *ekklesia* has a responsibility to spread the Gospel:

MATTHEW 5:14-16 “**You [the saints] are the light of the world.** A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 “Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are* in the house. 16 “**Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.**

Jesus was speaking here to a **multitude** of people at the very beginning of His ministry. They were simple folk. There were no apostles or elders at that point so this is a commandment to all disciples. What does it mean to be a light?

PHILIPPIANS 2:15-16 [**You are**] **children of God** without fault **in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights** in the world, 16 **holding fast the word of life**, ...

People who are lights are those who HOLD FAST (retain) the Word of Life! Is that not the basis of the Gospel? ‘Holding fast’ to the Word of Life does not mean to keep it hidden. Hiding the Gospel out of fear or, worst of all, shame can mean the loss of salvation:

LUKE 9:26 “For **whoever is ashamed of** Me [*Jesus Christ*] and **My words [the Gospel], of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes** in His *own* glory, and in His Father’s, and of the holy angels.

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<sup>3</sup> Matt. 16:24; Mark 2:15.

Preachers in the last decades have caused people to be ashamed of the Gospel by preaching fear of possible persecution. But notice this about suffering:

1 PETER 3:13-17 And who *is* he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? 14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, *you are* blessed. “And **do not be afraid of their threats**, nor be troubled.” 15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always **be ready to give [an answer] to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope [of the Gospel] that is in you**, with meekness and fear; 16 having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. 17 For **it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil**.

1 PETER 4:16 Yet **if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed**, but let him glorify God in this matter.

Finally, Jesus said this about the Gospel in an early prophecy of the end-times:

MATTHEW 10:23 “When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I [*Jesus Christ*] say to you, **you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes**.

The context of this is the coming Day of Judgment (v. 15) so it is for today; meaning you, me, and everyone who is “**holding fast the word of life**.” It is also about the cities of ISRAEL—descendants of the Ten Tribes! It is where most of us live, not in a foreign land.

A website does NOT preach the Gospel to those who have not heard it. Sending a preacher to people in Africa who ALREADY heard the Gospel is also not preaching it. All the *ekklesia* are commanded to be a light in the world—at least their small corner of it. Everyone has contact with other people and shining a light could be telling your boss about the Sabbaths and holydays; letting a neighbor know you are going to the Feast of Tabernacles; telling a contractor that he cannot work on Sabbaths; or saying “may God bless you” to a flustered clerk at the store. Letting our light shine is a beautiful thing:

ROMANS 10:15 ... As it is written [*Isa. 52:7*]: “**How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel** of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!”

Put away any fear or shame of spreading the Gospel and let those in our small part of this world know we are disciples and followers of Christ who await His return. Our great desire and hope that lies within each of us was through the Gospel! So, how can we withhold that from others?

LUKE 12:34-36 “For **where your treasure is, there your heart will be also**. 35 “Let your waist be girded and **your lamps burning**; 36 “and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that **when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately**.”

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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