

## FIELDWORK TRAINING

Mark 6:1-13

Key Verse: 6:7

*“Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits.”*

Today’s passage focuses on the fieldwork training of Jesus’ disciples. The disciples were spiritually young. They did not fully understand Jesus’ compassion for the people. They didn’t know why they had to proclaim the kingdom of God when the religious leaders didn’t. Nevertheless, Jesus sent them out on a training mission, in the hope that they would become future spiritual leaders for God’s world salvation work. Today’s passage also tells us about Jesus’ visit with his hometown people. They rejected him because of his humble human background. It wasn’t an ideal situation for doing God’s work. But Jesus did not give up. Let us think about what Jesus wants us to do.

### I. JESUS WAS REJECTED BY HIS HOMETOWN PEOPLE (1-6a)

Look at verse 1. *“Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples.”* After healing Jairus’ daughter, Jesus and his disciples went to his hometown of Nazareth. Jesus had just completed the first round of his Galilean ministry. He preached the kingdom of God. He healed the sick and drove out demons. He took care of crowds of people who came to him. He also trained his disciples to be men of faith. The news of his ministry was spreading beyond Galilee. Now he had a chance to visit his own hometown, Nazareth, where he grew up as the oldest son of Mary and Joseph.

When the Sabbath came, Jesus went to the synagogue and began to teach the word of God. Jesus had compassion on the people in his hometown including his family, relatives and neighbors. He taught them the word of God with a broken shepherd’s heart. What was their initial reaction? Many who heard him were amazed (2). His teaching was full of God’s truth. His word had power and authority. His teaching was different from that of the teachers of the law who talked about the fine points of the religious laws. The religious leaders usually taught them the dos and don’ts from Torah that weighed down on them instead of uplifting their spirits. But the word of God Jesus gave them was like fresh air. Jesus told them, “The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news” (1:15). His teaching touched their hearts.

However, where there was work of God, there was also work of Satan. The devil came and snatched away the word of life from them. Instead of obeying the word of truth, they began to see Jesus with their human eyes. Look at verses 2-3. *“Where did this man get these things?” they asked. “What’s this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles! Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?”* They remembered that Jesus had no degree in theology. He didn’t even graduate from high school. They knew that he used to work in his father’s carpentry shop. They also knew that his brothers and sisters were no special people. So they said, “Hey, this guy is so ordinary. He is not much different

from us. Why should we listen to him?" They not only said derogatory things about Jesus, but also got offended by his authority and power. Verse 3 says that they took offense at him. When they focused on the human background of the Messiah, they could not hear the good news. Jesus the Son of God came to the world as a humble, ordinary shepherd to help them, but they could not see the beautiful love of our Lord. Their spiritual eyes were blinded by their human thinking.

The people had been eagerly waiting for the Messiah. In Mark 10, we learn that even a blind beggar had the dream of seeing the Messiah. When he heard that Jesus healed the sick and cast out demons and proclaimed the kingdom of God to the poor, he acknowledged Jesus as the Son of God. The long-awaited Messiah finally came and visited his hometown and spoke to them the good news of the kingdom of God. But the hometown people were blinded by their human ideas. They despised and rejected the Messiah. The best possible gift was placed in the palms of their hands, but they could not take it.

We must pray that we may not be spiritually blinded by our own human ideas or conventional wisdom of this world. God loves and gives many blessings to his people. He has blessed us with the word of God to shine our paths. He has given us our life as his gift and a purpose in life to fulfill. Even a hardship in life may turn out to be a blessing if we endure it by faith. Most of all God sent his one and only Son Jesus to be our Savior. Unfortunately some people do not recognize this blessing because they are spiritually blind. We must pray to God to help us to remain humble and to have his spirit of wisdom so that we may not be like the people of Nazareth. St. Paul says in Ephesians 1:17-18: "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints...."

Look at verse 6a. *"And he was amazed at their lack of faith."* God sent the long-awaited Messiah to save them. The people of Nazareth should have had faith to see Jesus as the Messiah. They should have acknowledged the work of God that he was doing and the word of God he preached. But they closed their eyes and ears. They insisted on their own ideas. They had no faith. Jesus was amazed by his hometown people's lack of faith. Jesus wanted to share the good news of the kingdom of God with them. Jesus wanted to invite all of them to the kingdom of God. He wanted to bless each and every one of them. But because of their spiritual blindness, Jesus could not do much for them.

Jesus was very sorry. Amazingly he still loved his hometown people who took offense at him. He laid hands on a few sick people and healed them (5). His hometown people had rejected him, but he did not reject them. He did what he could to help the people who came to him by faith. He also comforted himself with the words of prophecy: "Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor" (4).

Jesus was disappointed by their lack of faith, but he did not give up. He went around teaching the word of God from village to village (6b). As disciples of Jesus, we must share the gospel of salvation with young people, not because we possess some special

qualities such as eloquence in speaking, a degree in theology or a magnetic personality. We must do so because God saved us at the cost of his Son's precious blood and has given us the word of truth that can save dying people. We may be rejected along the way by people who are close to us, even by our family, friends and neighbors. We may be rejected because of our humble background. But we must struggle to share the good news because it can change their lives. This is what St. Paul meant when he said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile" (Ro 1:16).

## II. HE SENT THEM OUT TWO BY TWO (6b-13)

Look at verses 6b-7. *"Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits."* Despite his painful experience in his own hometown, Jesus did not slow down his work. He moved on to other villages and preached the gospel. And he went one step further--Jesus sent out his young disciples on a training mission. We can learn several things from Jesus.

**First, two by two.** Why did Jesus send them out two by two? By sending them out in pairs, Jesus helped them to learn how to co-work. Jesus knew that in a battle, teamwork is very important. While one soldier dashes toward the enemy line, the other can cover for him. This truth can also be applied to spiritual warfare. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 says, "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!" In fact, our God provides a model for teamwork. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit work together for world salvation. God the Father planned our salvation. His Son came to die on the cross to set us free from the bondage of sin. The Holy Spirit baptizes us to complete our personal salvation. Jesus also emphasized the importance of teamwork when he promised in Matthew 18:20, "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." A fruitful ministry is possible when God's servants are united to form a holy vessel. God's work cannot be a one-man show. This is the reason why Jesus sent them out two by two. May God help us to learn to work together as a team as we carry out our mission!

**Second, authority over evil spirits.** How did Jesus equip his disciples when he sent them out to the world? Did he give them a karate lesson for self-defense? Did he require them to take Psychology 101 or interpersonal communication course? Did he give them a seminar on how to be street smart? No. Verse 7 says that he gave them authority over evil spirits. Jesus knew that their mission was not about successful business dealings, but about bringing the people back to God from their bondage of sin and Satan. They had to fight against the forces of the evil spirits. They needed the power and authority of God to bring the people to the Lord. This authority is essential in carrying out the work of God. That is why Jesus gave this authority to the disciples for this fieldwork training, and later to all his disciples when he gave the great commission. Matthew 28:18-19 says, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ..." Jesus also promised in Acts 1:8, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit

comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Our struggle is not against the flesh and blood (Eph 6:12). Our battle is against evil spirits. We need a weapon from God. We need the help of the Holy Spirit. May God grant us his authority over evil spirits so that we can help our sheep to come to God and be saved! May God help us to depend on the spiritual authority of Jesus as we carry out our mission!

**Third, depend on God only.** Look at verses 8-9. *These were his instructions: “Take nothing for the journey except a staff--no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra tunic.”* Did Jesus mean that they should become like homeless people, or like Buddhist monks, who have to beg for their food? No! His instructions were given as *principles*. These principles demanded of them total commitment and dependence on God. One clear principle we learn from these verses is that we should not depend on money or other human means, but on God only, as we proclaim the gospel of Jesus.

Some time ago, the minister of a church had an idea to increase the attendance of his church. His church bought a supermarket that was going out of business. After each Sunday service, people were told to go to the supermarket and get whatever they wanted--free of charge. The number of his congregation increased dramatically. I just wonder what happened to the attendance after all the items in the supermarket were gone. Money and faith do not go hand in hand.

**Fourth, the superiority of the gospel.** Look at verses 10-11. *“Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them.”* The disciples were told to accept the hospitality offered to them. They should stay with a family in order to establish personal relationships with the family members. But they should not compromise for the sake of some logistical reasons. They should not move around looking for better deals on lodging and food.

What if some people would not listen to them? Should they compromise? Should they learn to be politically correct to show their sensitivity towards people’s feelings? Should they change the words, “Repent your sins and believe in Jesus,” into something like, “Search your heart and follow it”? Should they say that gay marriage is okay because it is an alternative lifestyle? Should they say that abortion is okay because women should have the right to do anything with their own body? No. Jesus told the disciples: *“And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them.”* If people refused to accept the gospel message, they should shake the dust off their feet. Jesus did not tell them to be rude, but to have a very clear attitude toward the gospel—the superiority of the gospel. To be useful gospel workers, we must study the word of God until we have a deep conviction that only the gospel of Jesus gives eternal life.

In their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas met oppositions from none other than their fellow Jews in many cities. In Pisidian Antioch, they had to shake the dust off their feet to warn the Jews, as Jesus had instructed them. "The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit" (Ac 13:49-52).

What did the disciples do in their fieldwork training? Look at verse 12. "*They went out and preached that people should repent.*" The disciples were spiritually young, but they obeyed the word of Jesus. Even though people did not like to hear the word, "Repent," they boldly preached the message of repentance. And because of their obedience, their training mission was successful.

Look at verse 13. "*They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.*" When they obeyed Jesus' words, the disciples could experience the power and authority to heal the sick and drive out demons. We must remember that Jesus also promised us the power and authority over evil spirits. We should not feel helpless before the evil spirits that seem to be so active in our society. Rather, we must ask God to grant us the authority over the evil spirits. Our enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1Pe 5:8). But we must know that Jesus wants us to have the authority and power over evil spirits and help our sheep to be led by the Holy Spirit.

In this passage, we learn that Jesus did not give up his mission when his hometown people rejected him. He sent out his young disciples for fieldwork training. He gave them instructions that were to be their principles. As servants of God, we must be men and women of principles, not victims of situation ethics. Jesus also gave his disciples authority over evil spirits. And they preached the message of repentance and drove out demons and healed the sick. May God help us to be trained as disciples who can preach the message of repentance and help many sin-sick people of our generation!