

Sent Ones – Marching Orders

From the Series, “The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe”

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Introduction

I have friends who have served in the military. All branches - Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force. We appreciate their service.

There’s an amazing variety of jobs in the military. We all know the main ones: We have soldiers and sailors and pilots. But all those people need support in different forms. You need truck drivers and mechanics and all kinds of specialists.



But apparently there’s one thing that all military people have in common. At some point, you march. It might be for a drill. It might be for a parade. Or it might be that you’re someplace where your feet are still the best way to get you from point A to point B. Today we have ways of getting people from one place to another that are much faster than walking. But there was a time when most soldiers travelled by simply lining up and marching.

I once heard an interview of some soldiers from the Viet Nam war who said that at some points you were only doing two things: You were either fighting, or you were marching to the next fight. Marching was so common in the military that soldiers all learned the following phrase: “Marching Orders”. The phrase is so common It’s actually got an official definition: Here’s one from “the Free Dictionary.com”

marching orders

pl n

1. (Military) military orders, especially to infantry, giving instructions about a march, its destination, etc.

We’re in our series, “The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe”. In this series we’re working our way through Matthew’s book about the life of Jesus Christ. Currently, we’re in a sub-series called “Sent Ones.” Jesus chose twelve men to carry his message, the gospel, into the world. They were called, “apostles” - A word that means “sent ones.”

Over the last several sessions we've learned their names:

- Peter and his brother Andrew.
- James, the son of Zebedee and his brother John.
- Philip and his good friend Bartholomew.
- Thomas and Matthew
- James, son of Alphaeus and Thaddaeus
- Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot.

Up to this point in Matthew's book, these men were called by Jesus from various walks of life. After calling them, Jesus trained these men - They followed him from place to place and watched as he taught, and as he served. Now, the trainees are ready for a task. To use a military term, they're ready for their first deployment. Let's read about the marching orders that Jesus gave to this group of men:

5 These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. 6 Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. 7 As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' 8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give. 9 "Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts— 10 no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep. 11 Whatever town or village you enter, search there for some worthy person and stay at their house until you leave. 12 As you enter the home, give it your greeting. 13 If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. 14 If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet. 15 Truly I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. (Matthew 10:5-15)

So, those are the marching orders. We want to understand them. Let's start with the nature of

"These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions:" (v 5)

That word, "instructions" is very interesting. In the original language, it's a strong word. It was sometimes used when a military commander gave orders to those under his command. Many in the military know the saying: "When an officer says 'jump', you don't ask 'why?' You ask how high?" So, these were commands. We translate the word as "instructions" because it also has a sense of "This is how you will do it." So, these were not instructions on how to bake a cake. These were instructions on how obedient followers were going to complete an important mission.

So, the commands that Jesus gave, the "marching orders", were important.

Jesus gave five orders. Let's look at each of them.

I. The Destination

The first order involved the destination. If soldiers are going out into battle, they need to know where to go - And possibly, which places to avoid. Jesus starts out just like that:

Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. 6 Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. (Matthew 10:5(b)-6)

So, in his first command, Jesus tells his sent ones to stay local. Why did he do this? In other places in the Bible, it's clear that the message of the gospel is to go out into the whole world. At the close of Matthew's book, after Jesus died and was resurrected, he gave a command to his followers that we know as "the Great Commission":

19 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, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19-20)

That phrase, "...go and make disciples of all nations...", is consistent with the history of the Hebrew people. Centuries before that time, God made a promise to Abraham, the father of the Jewish people.

2 "I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.
3 I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you."
(Genesis 12:2-3)

Look at that last line: "...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." God made it clear from the earliest days of the Jewish nation that Abraham's children were not to receive all of God's love. All nations were to hear the knowledge of God. Add to this the fact that it was not unusual for Jesus to talk to gentiles and Samaritans. When he met people from those groups, he listened to what they had to say.

So, if the eventual goal was the whole world, why did Jesus tell his sent ones to stay local for their first mission? Commentators have suggested several reasons. To start out, the first apostles needed *focus*. One day, they would travel out into the world, but they had to start locally. This was the first time since the apostles met Jesus that he wasn't going to be right at

their sides. So, this assignment was time-limited and space-limited. In travelling to the Jewish nation, the apostles were taking on a big task - But not an overwhelming task.

What does that mean for us? Maybe any given church should consider being focused on a limited number of things? If you try to do everything, you will likely fail at something. That's discouraging. Maybe we need to get focused? Let's talk about what that would look like.

Next, this provided **familiarity**. The Jewish people all had the same language and customs. All of the apostles were Jewish. As we learned their names, we mentioned that the names we hear have come to us through centuries of different languages. Here is the original list of names: Peter's is the most complicated. He started as "Shimon". That's a variation of "Simeon", one of the twelve sons of Israel. Jesus gave him the nickname "Cephas" which means, "rock." In Greek that became "Petros" or Peter.

Andrew and Philip were Greek names. We discussed the fact that their parents may have been compromisers. However, there were lots of other Jews who did the same thing, so these were common names in Israel.

James is a variation of "Yacov" or "Jacob" Jacob was the grandson of Abraham. Jacob's name was later changed to "Israel". John was "Yochanon" - That's a variation of "Jonah", the famous prophet. Bartholomew was Bar-Talmi, or "son of Talmi". Matthew was Mattityahu, meaning, "gift from God." Thomas was "Tau'ma", an Aramaic word that means "twin." Thaddaeus was a variant of Theudas, which was a Grecian version of Judas. Judas is a variation of Judah, who was another son of Israel. His name would be pronounced "Yehuda".

And as we learned, "Jesus" comes from "Joshua". In the original it would be pronounced "Yeshua".

So, the apostles were all Jews, and they were sent first to the Jewish people. When the day came for the apostles to travel out into the world, they could add the task of learning new languages and cultures. For now, it would be easier to work with people who had things in common with them.

What does that mean for us? We talked about focus. For us that means start out with the people you know. If someone accepts Jesus as their savior, we don't immediately send them to Bible college or seminary and then to some foreign land. We just send them home so they can share with their family and friends. If a given church attracts a certain group of people, there's nothing wrong with that. They can work with what they have and try to reach more of those people. If people come from different people groups, then you can start reaching those people groups. You don't want to be limited to the familiar, but there's nothing wrong with starting there.

Finally, there was a sense of "**first things first.**" When God started his revelation with Mankind, he started with the children of Abraham, the Jewish people. In the Bible, there are two groups

of people: The first group is the Hebrew people. The other group is everyone else. The Jewish word for “everyone else” is the “gentiles.” If you’re not a Jew, you’re a gentile.

What I’m about to say is a little hard for us gentiles. Although God always intended for his love to be extended to the whole world, the Jews always came first. So, the first mission of the apostles was limited to them. That’s a much larger topic, and we’ll be able to expand on it in later as we study Matthew’s book.

So, the first command of the marching orders that Jesus gave to his sent ones was the destination. They were to limit their reach to just the Jewish people living in the Jewish nation of the day.

Let’s move on to the second command.

II. The Mission Objective

The second command of the marching orders involved the objective. Let’s read it:

As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’
(Matthew 10:7)

The objective involved a message. This message was consistent with what people were hearing up to this point. Here’s an example: Early on, we met John the Baptist. Here was his main message:

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” (Matthew 3:1-2)

Later Jesus preached the same message:

From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” (4:17)

So, the main objective of the apostles was to repeat what John the Baptist and Jesus had been saying all along.

The kingdom of heaven has two aspects. First, it’s the heavenly kingdom where God rules. One day, God will rule everywhere. His heavenly kingdom will come to the earth. That will be a wonderful time. We’ll talk more about how wonderful in the future.

Here’s where we need to mention something important. When Jesus came, he offered this kingdom to mankind. He made what some call a “*bona fide*” offer. If the people of the world had accepted Jesus the Messiah as their king, the kingdom of heaven would have come at that

time. The world would have been made a much better place. However, mankind as a whole did not accept Jesus as their king. They rejected him and crucified him. A few followed, but most did not. And so, the arrival of the heavenly kingdom is still in the future. Because of that, it can be hard studying a book like Matthew. At some times, Jesus says things that are part of this bona-fide offer. They apply to the time they were spoken, but they are not in effect today. We still have the principle of those things, but not the whole promise. We'll run into a few of those in the group of marching orders that we're studying, so you'll see that more clearly in a few moments.

There's a second aspect of the kingdom. It's anyplace where Jesus rules. If Jesus rules in your heart, then you represent property of the kingdom of heaven. So, whereas some things we'll look at aren't for today, this is still in effect.

We can say to people, "The kingdom of heaven is near – it's a decision away." If you invite Jesus into your heart, you're in the kingdom. If you die, you will go to the heavenly kingdom. If the kingdom arrives on earth while you're still alive, then you're in! Today we might say, "The doorway to the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

This is important for us - We have to ask ourselves: ***Do we have a clear message?*** If someone comes to us and asks what they need to do more than anything else in life, can we tell them? Here it is: The kingdom of heaven is at hand. We have not obeyed God - We have rebelled. We all need to repent. We need to be saved from our sins. Only then can we enter the kingdom of heaven.

So, the second command was the mission objective: The message of the kingdom. The apostles had a clear message – we, too, must have one.

III. Credentials

The next command was to present credentials. Let's read:

Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons.
(Matthew 10:8 (a))

We've mentioned several times that the people of Israel were looking for the Messiah. When he came, he was to show evidence that he was the chosen one. He was to show credentials. Jesus did just that. He fulfilled prophecies made centuries earlier. He showed great power. He did things like healing the sick raising the dead, cleansing leprosy, and driving out demons.

He gave his sent one authority to do all these things in his name. It must have been amazing! We'll find out later that the apostles were successful in this. However, here is an example of something that was in effect in the days of Jesus, but not for us today. If someone is sick, we are instructed to pray for them. Sometimes, God is gracious and shows his power by healing

them. Sometimes though, that person may be on a different path - God shows his grace to those people by helping them to bear the pain of an illness.

Some would disagree with this. They would say we have the same gifts today. You can see some of them on TV. Sadly, many of those people fall into the group of people we call “false prophets.” We ran into that group back in the Sermon on the mount, and we’ll run into them again later.

If someone thinks these are gifts for today, notice that one of the gifts is raising the dead. If you feel you have this gift, go find a local hospital. When they wheel someone out of a failed surgery, see what you can do. There are surely a number of large cemeteries close by. We can drive there and once again, go for it!

I’m not against the idea that God may give people special gifts for special times. The Scriptures talk of a day when this age will end. At that time, we will see miracles again. It’s just that for most of us, in the meantime, God has a different path.

As a practical matter, we can give all kinds of help to people who are hurting. Although not official credentials, it is a great help to our testimony to the world when we share our message and include acts of kindness.

So, the third part of the marching orders that Jesus gave to his apostles was presenting credentials. Let’s move on the next command.

IV. Provisions

The next command involves provisions for the mission. Every good army needs provisions for the troops. In this case, the business of acquiring provisions had two parts.

A. Service was provided for free.

Freely you have received; freely give. (Matthew 10:8 (b))

The apostles were to serve people. Only unlike many in their day, they were to serve for free. They were not to charge any money for what they did. Here’s an example: In those days, there were exorcists. People who claimed that they could cast out demons. Many of them charged a large fee. If someone you cared about was thought to be oppressed by dark forces, you would be willing to pay any amount to have them freed. Whether these people, these exorcists, were for real or not, we don’t know. We only know that they made a good living. For the sent one, this was not to be. They were to provide their help for free.

On the other hand, everyone needs to eat. How were the sent ones to get what they needed to live?

B. Support came from godly people along the way.

Let's read on:

Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts— no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep.
(Matthew 10:9-10)

Most people, if they went on a journey, would take along some provisions. They would take money - In this case, gold, silver, or copper. They would place the money in a money belt. Then, they might grab some food, which they would place in a bag. You would certainly grab some extra clothes if you have them.

Here, we're looking at another example of something that was meant for a certain time, but not for today. The apostles were told that they were not to take any of the normal provisions that you would expect. They were to expect something that was influenced by the supernatural. Now, I chose those words carefully. They were not to expect money to fall from the skies. Rather, look at that last sentence: "...the worker is worth his keep."

Here's what this means: God was going to provide godly people along the way who would support the work that the apostles were doing. What did that look like here? Let's read on:

Whatever town or village you enter, search there for some worthy person and stay at their house until you leave. (Matthew 10:11)

So, here's how the apostles were going to be taken care of. When they reached a town or village, they were to look for a worthy person. A worthy person was someone who would recognize the value of what the apostles were doing. They, along with others in the location, would help out. A worthy person would say, "Hey everyone, the apostles of Jesus are here. Hey, stay at my place, OK. Are you hungry, we're having dinner – join us!"

So, the apostles were not to say, "I will only come to your village if you pay us." They were not to beg from house to house. They were not to hold out for the best deal. They would look for the first worthy person and accept what they were offered. They were to assume that this would be just enough to get them through that visit. Then, they were to move on.

So, this was not miraculous in terms of money and food appearing magically. However, the apostles were to assume that God would work supernaturally in the hearts of people so that those people would feel led to help out.

Today, churches should run on a similar principle (or at least they should). We don't charge for people to receive the message of the gospel. However, we encourage people to give generously to the work of the church as they are led by God.

So, the fourth command involved provisions.

V. Recipients

The last command is related. - It involves the recipients of the apostles' work. Let's read about that:

12 As you enter the home, give it your greeting. 13 If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. 14 If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet. 15 Truly I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. (Matthew 10:12-15)

The final part of the marching orders involved a very simple rule:

- People who accept you get blessed.
- People who reject you get left behind.

The word that we translate here as "peace" is the word "Shalom". That means good things in general. It certainly involves peace, but it also involves health and wellbeing. If someone accepts the sent one, their peace, or their shalom would extend to that home. If the apostles went to a village and could find no one who wanted to hear the message, there was a special symbol. They would shake the dust off their feet.

Why would they do that? We mentioned that there are Jews and Gentiles. That should not technically involve a value judgement - It's just a matter of fact. However, some residents of Israel made it a value judgment. Gentiles to some were inferior, perhaps even dirty. So, if someone from this group was travelling and they entered a territory controlled by gentiles, on the day that they returned they would shake the dust off their feet to keep their homeland pure.

As such, to say to a Jew, "I have the dust that you live on stuck to my feet - I'm shaking it off", was like saying they were worse than a gentile. It was a condemnation. Today we might say, "Them's fightin' words."

Again, things are different today. In those days, the Lord of glory was walking the earth. He was making a bona-fide offer of the kingdom of heaven. So, there wasn't time to get into arguments. You were either on board, or you were not. If someone could see the miracles that Jesus and his apostles offered and they still weren't interested, things would go badly for them. It would be worse for that town we're told than for Sodom and Gomorrah.

Today, we have more time. However, some of this principle remains. If someone is interested in what we believe, we talk with them. If they're not, we are under no obligation to hound them.

We don't chase people or drag them in. We let them come when they're ready.

Let's pull this all together.

Conclusion

The men that Jesus chose to lead his church were ready for their first assignment. Jesus gave them marching orders. Some of those orders were for that day. Jesus and his apostles were announcing the Kingdom of heaven. It was a bona fide offer, so the men could show credentials like raising the dead.

Sadly, the world rejected the message of the kingdom. So, some of the marching orders apply to us today - Some don't.

Let's work on the ones that do apply today. We'll learn more about them as we continue to study Matthew's book together.

Let's continue to study. One day, the Kingdom of Heaven will come. Until it does, let's work hard to find out which marching orders apply to us, so we can accomplish the mission that Jesus has for us.

Thanks for reading! Here are some helpful links:

Trinity Church
www.TrinityTeaneck.org

Phil's Site
PhilBrainerd.com

To learn how to begin a new life with Jesus Christ, visit Billy Graham's site:
PeaceWithGod.net