



ACT TWO: KINGDOM MISSION

Little Christs (10:1 – 12:42)

Little Christs

Matthew 10:1 – 42

The word Christian simply means 'little Christ' and was originally a term of abuse which the believers adopted as a badge of honour; (Acts 11:26, 26:28; 1Peter 4:16). Act Two of Matthew's gospel is therefore about the need to expand and grow an army of 'little Christs'.

Jesus has no doubt that power will be diluted when multiplying. From day one, the disciples did great acts and Jesus expected the Father to work through them the same way He worked through Him. Satan hopes that we tone down our expectations of Kingdom mission; however, Jesus says anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing and greater (John 14 vs. 11-12).

- Jesus expected his followers to merely imitate not innovate.
- To preach the same message that he did, that God's Kingdom had come and Satan, sin and sickness could not stand before his Messiah.
 - Offer the Gospel promise of peace whilst also threatening judgment upon all who reject him.
- They were to listen to what Jesus whispered in their ears through the Holy Spirit and then speak this out.
- They were heirs to the Messianic promise of Isaiah 50 vs.4:
'The Sovereign LORD has given me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught.'
- The success of what is said depends entirely on what is heard.
- So long as we live in Kingdom intimacy, we will never run out of Kingdom messages.
- Jesus made no promises that Kingdom Mission would be easy. He wanted them in a place of poverty and need so whoever heard the message could respond in a practical way to embrace it. He wanted them to be vulnerable and defenseless, 'like sheep among wolves', for then they would rely entirely on Him.
- Christ-follower is someone prepared to walk the path of Christ's suffering for the sake of a dying world → 2 Timothy 3 vs. 12.
 - ❖ They would be friends of sinners and dwell in the homes of those they sought to reach.
 - ❖ The 1st trip was to the lost sheep of Israel but this was just the start of a greater task, requiring a greater army.
 - ❖ Jesus promised that they would be successful.
 - There is no lack of harvest but lack of workers; Matthew 9:37-38

Do not fall into Satan's great lie saying working is hard because as workers of Christ we simply gather what he has pre-purchased with his own blood, being what it means to be his 'little Christs'.

Gehenna Matthew 10:28

Jesus talked a lot about hell making Him very unpopular. The gospels quote him speaking four times about *Hades*, twice about the *place of torment*, eight times about *hell's fire*, and seven times about *gnashing of teeth*. He talked more about hell than the whole of the Old Testament put together, and he even pioneered a new way of describing it → eleven times he called it *Gehenna*.

- *Gehenna* was simply the Greek way of writing *Gey Hinnom* or Hebrew for *Valley of Hinnom* where child sacrifices were made to the demon-idol.
 - ❖ This was a deep narrow gorge along the south-western side of Jerusalem and was once a beautiful place before the kings of Judah corrupted it.
- This became a horrific reminder that God will always judge sin especially after Babylonians took Jerusalem and piled corpses there.
 - ❖ Nowhere in Israel as disgusting as *Gehenna*
- Jesus described hell as *Gehenna* as people would identify and listen.
 - ❖ They could not dismiss his talk of maggots, heat and fire and darkness as metaphors.
- Jesus chose the word to show that hell is entirely just!
 - ❖ *Gehenna* is where God judged the demon-god Molech and avenged the blood of child-victims; therefore hell is where God punishes the Devil and demons.
 - ❖ Those who sided with Molech were thrown into *Gehenna* and those who side with Satan will be thrown into hell.
 - ❖ This is not unfair or excessive → it is simply the fair response to high treason against our Creator-God.

C.S. Lewis reminds us: *“There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’ All that are in hell choose it.”*

Jesus chose the name *Gehenna* because he wants us to grasp his great love for us.

- ❖ Unless we look at the horrors of the valley, we don't realize how much it cost Jesus to bear our judgment on the cross – Matthew 26 vs. 38.
- ❖ Unless we look into valley of fires, and recoil from the heat and stench, we will not understand why the Father turned his back on Jesus – Matthew 27 vs. 46

Hell doesn't make God less loving but it reveals the depth of love which went to hell and back.

- ❖ He used hell as a siren to awaken people to Kingdom mission.
- ❖ Because hell is real, we will deal radically with sin so nothing comes between us and the Gospel.

Jesus taught about *Gehenna* for the sake of his followers and for the sake of the world he would save through them. He calls us to gaze long into its torment, and to rise up to plunder the gates of hell.

“He is the true lover of men who faithfully warns them concerning the eternal woe that awaits the impenitent; while he who paints the miseries of hell as though they were but trifling is seeking to murder men's souls under the pretext of friendship.”

Charles Spurgeon

Tyre, Sidon and Sodom Matthew 11:20 – 24

Before Jesus' first-century followers could give themselves fully to his Kingdom mission, two great questions needed to be answered and cleared up if an army of Kingdom missionaries was ever to be unleashed upon the world:

1. *Could Jews be saved through their Judaism without Christ?*

- The Greek word *genea* which Jesus uses five times here refers to either a *generation* or ethnic *race*.
- ❖ Jesus says John the Baptist is greater than Moses and David and all other OT heroes as he heralded the Messiah.
- ❖ He attacks the Jewish *genea* or *race* for being impossible to please. They complained that John ate too little and Jesus ate too much and they rejected miracles which would have converted pagan Tyre and Sidon, and even proverbially wicked Sodom.
 - ❖ Jeremiah 6 vs.16, prophesy for Jerusalem to listen and repent or be destroyed.
- Matthew demonstrates that Judaism without Christ is powerless to save and acts as a barrier to the message of salvation.
- Pharisees plot to kill Jesus after clash on Sabbath
 - ❖ They lecture Jesus about the 4th commandment but ignore the fact that they are breaking the 6th commandment.
- They dismiss Jesus as a Satanist; however, He replies that if they dare dismiss the Holy Spirit's work as Satanism they will go to hell – by doing this they reject the Gospel through which God wants to forgive us.
- Jesus warns that unless they respond with faith to casting out demons, they will open themselves up to seven times as many demons.
- Adding insult to injury, he tells them that Nineveh and the Gentile queen of Sheba accepted the Gospel much better than them. He also says even his mother and brothers cannot be saved unless they submit to his call.
- *There is no salvation for anyone outside of Christ.*

2. *Could nations which had never heard the Gospel be spared through their ignorance?*

- Matthew 11:20-24
- God doesn't merely judge on the basis of *sin*, but on the basis of their *sin* plus revelation received.
- Tyre and Sidon were judged less severely than Galilee cities where Jesus appeared and did miracles.
- Sodom, full of sin, would be judged less severely too, than Galilee cities because they also never saw Jesus the miracle working Messiah.
- Nevertheless, being judged *less severely* is different from *not* being judged at all.
- Tyrians, Sidonians, Sodomites, and their modern equivalents, all have:-
 - ❖ Eyes to see the glory of God.
 - ❖ Consciences to know right from wrong
 - ❖ All fall short of their own standards, let alone God's.
- They will not be judged for rejecting a Christ whom they never heard of but for doing what their own conscience told them was sinful.
- There is no salvation outside of Christ, even for the ignorant!
- This is why the early Christians rose up and joined King Jesus' army of Kingdom missionaries
 - either receive him or pay the price.
- Two thousand years later, our mission is still the same.

Rise up and fall in behind Jesus as without him no one can be saved.

My Yoke is Easy
Matthew 11:25 – 30

- Invitation from Jesus to place his yoke on our necks and we will find rest which goes against all logic.

First-century yoke – a heavy wooden beam used by farmers to join two oxen so that they could pull a plough or a cart together. A symbol of hard labour and even oppression.

When Jesus talks about yoking us to his plough, he is not simply talking about giving us rest but that we should;-

1. Minister with him.
 - Jesus wants to train us to be agents of his Kingdom who can plough up hard ground of our world and pave way for the Kingdom harvest of chapter 13.
 - The yoke he gives will cause us to find the work exhilarating rather than exhausting.
2. Minister by His grace alone
 - We need grace to communicate the Gospel of God otherwise we burn out and give up.
 - Jesus invites us to wear his yoke:
 - ❖ A yoke is a pulling collar for two and He does the pulling = makes it easy and light.
 - ❖ Therefore, we make rapid progress by the grace of God.
3. Minister on His terms alone
 - Pharisees refused the terms Jesus offered (chapters 11 & 12).
 - Jesus rejoices that God makes 'little children' like the ignorant disciples lay down everything to minister on His terms.
 - If two oxen pull in separate directions, not much is done and it's exhausting. Therefore, if we totally surrender to Jesus it is easy.
4. Minister by His power alone
 - Ministry begins with the Father, as the mission of the Son, executed by the Holy Spirit, worked out through us.
 - Ministry belongs to the Trinity before it rests on our shoulders → John 15 vs. 5
 - Human co-operation with God's initiatives is empowered by the Holy Spirit and refreshes us even as we serve.
 - If we have any doubt on how to wear Jesus' light yoke, we can simply look to Him and see how He wore it himself.
 - He bore the yoke for us in every way, so we can now bear the yoke alongside Him.

There's simply nothing lighter than the burden of Christ!

Sabbath

Matthew 12:1 – 14

- Sabbath day of rest is very important to a Jew.
 - Sabbath-breakers were punished, even with death.
- Jesus also took it very seriously, and He became the perfect sacrifice for sin as He had completely fulfilled the Mosaic Law with all its Sabbath regulations.
- Matthew uses Sabbath to highlight the difference between Jesus and the rabbis.

- The Hebrew verb *shabath* means *to stop work or to rest*.
- The first Sabbath day was on the seventh day of creation. This was God giving a model for us to follow as human beings need rest to function well.
- Adam didn't work on his first day (i.e. the seventh day) so it reminded him to rest by grace through faith in the finished work of God.
 - ❖ Sabbath not just about resting but having faith to stop working because God has worked for us.

The Pharisees turned Sabbath into a day about hard work with rules and regulations which turned salvation into salvation through 'good' works.

- Their clash with the disciples over picking and eating grain on the Sabbath; of which the disciples saw the corn as God's gracious and effortless provision for their need, making it a perfect opportunity to Sabbath in His grace.
- Their clash with Jesus over healing a deformed man and felt that healing someone was work and so couldn't be done on the Sabbath. Yet Jesus saw a man in dire need of healing through the Gospel and invited him to Sabbath in God's gracious work.
- Jesus shows them that this is not the Gospel of the Old Testament.
- Judaism has ceased to be the Gospel of grace; therefore the religion must not only *embrace* Christ but give way to Him.

- Jesus loves the Pharisees and the Jewish nation so much that He resorts to a last tactic which he knows will end in surrender or murder. He declares that He is the Son of Man who created the Sabbath.
- He is God the Judge who alone is able to declare a person innocent and the true Temple where God dwells in human flesh.
- If the Pharisees had read in Scripture, they would have seen this to be true and would have seen that they have strayed from the Gospel of grace.
- We are all potential Pharisees, and we can all too easily forget the finished work of Christ.

The true Gospel is the Gospel of the Sabbath:

“Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.” Romans 4:4-5

The Sign of Jonah Matthew 12:38 – 42

Is Christianity an empty faith/lie? Jesus, in Matthew 12 speaks about “the sign of Jonah” as a typological metaphor for His future crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. Christianity is not just a philosophy, like Buddhism, communism, or existentialism, to be debated at leisure with friends. It is a faith in a person, and a historical event.

The Romans and the Jews didn’t deny the fact that Jesus’ body disappeared after 3 days – even enemies agree that Jesus died, was buried, and three days later his body disappeared.

Could first-century people be simply gullible and readily assumed missing body meant risen Christ. All evidence suggests that they were very cynical, like you and me.

- *Perhaps the disciples made up the whole story?* But why make the empty tomb so central to their message? Why would they lay down their lives for a claim which they knew was a scam, and how would they convince the world that their preposterous story was true? - 1 Corinthians 15 vs. 1 – 20
- *Then perhaps it wasn’t Jesus who really died?* But how could you fool a watching mother? And it still doesn’t explain the disappearance of the corpse.
- *Perhaps Jesus fainted and recovered later in the tomb?* John Stott answers this in no uncertain terms:

Are we really to believe... that after the rigours and pains of trial, mockery, flogging and crucifixion he could survive thirty-six hours in a stone sepulcher with neither warmth nor food nor medical care? That he could then rally sufficiently to perform the superhuman feat of shifting the boulder which secured the mouth of the tomb, and this without disturbing the Roman guard? That then, weak and sickly and hungry, he could appear to the disciples in such a way as to give them the impression that he had vanquished death? That he could go on to claim that he had died and risen, could send them into all the world and promise to be with them unto the end of time? That he could live somewhere in hiding for forty days, making occasional surprise appearances, and then finally disappear without explanation? Such credulity is more incredible than Thomas’ unbelief.

By this ‘sign of Jonah’, Jesus has given us compelling proof that he is the Messiah.