

Prayer

Almighty Lord and God, receive my prayers today

Almighty Lord and God, listen to my deepest concerns

Almighty Lord and God, forgive my wayward nature

Almighty Lord and God, tell me what I need to hear

Almighty Lord and God, fill me with Your power and love

Almighty Lord and God, make me complete in You

AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Community Spirit

Pray today that Christian people in your neighbourhood might hear God's call to witness together to the 'Body of Christ' which already exists within your street, village or town.

On-going prayers

- *Pray about the morality of sport whilst the Olympics are held*
- *Pray for people experiencing droughts and turmoil in Africa*
- *Give thanks for the gift of life*

Meditation

Sin is a fearsome and persistent enemy;
It suggests, tempts, and draws us into its deception.

We wander from the truth, little by little,
And find that we have left the Lord's path behind.

We come across something that faith requires of us,
And the devil whispers, 'Surely not!' So we don't do it.

We hold on to awful habits, not thinking they are bad,
And fail to let the Lord deliver us from our daily sins.

We accept the vices of our culture; casual sex, dishonesty ...
And turn from scriptures warnings about loose morality.

We reserve the right to speak as we wish, to say what we think,
And forget the wisdom of precise and thoughtful speech.

Save us, Father, and give us courage to face our enemy,
To reject His temptation and turn towards Your path.

Bible Study - Matthew 10:11-15

¹¹ Whatever town or village you enter, search for one who is worthy, and stay with them until you leave. ¹² As you enter the house, greet it. ¹³ If the house is worthy, let your peace come on it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. ¹⁴ If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from off your feet when you leave that house or town. ¹⁵ Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the Day of Judgment than for that town.

Review

This passage of scripture follows on from Jesus' initial instructions to the disciples. He had commissioned them to extend Jesus' own ministry by spreading out into the surrounding towns and cities and doing what they had seen Him do. Now, Jesus told the disciples were they should go and stay. If they were not to worry about earthly provisions (10:5-10), their earthly requirements had to come from somewhere, so Jesus explained that they had to rely on 'hospitality'. In ancient times, perhaps more even than in Jesus' day, hospitality was regarded as a sacred duty in many countries, including most of the Middle East as we know it now. The one clear Biblical example of a city that was not hospitable was Sodom (Gen 19), and this is the reason why it is mentioned at the end of our text!

Jesus had already told the disciples that they should go to Jewish communities to do their ministry (10:6), so he assumed the general hospitality of the Judaism of his day. When the disciples went anywhere, they were to 'search for one who is worthy'. What does this mean? The word 'worthy' appears three times in this passage (10:11,13[x2]), and it appears to define the acceptability of the hospitality offered. If we remember that most towns and cities around Lake Galilee were of mixed population, with Jews and Gentiles living close to each other, but doubtless in racial enclaves, it could be that Jesus was telling the disciples to seek out the Jewish community first. They would be most likely to receive the message about the Messiah and the signs and wonders they had been commissioned to perform (10:1,8). However, it probably goes deeper than that. Worthiness is a combination of trust, openness and honesty, and although it is vitally important in human relationships, there is no way of recognising it on the spur of the moment. For this reason, Jesus gave a test designed to assess worthiness, and it was based upon the Hebrew idea of 'peace'.

In Hebrew, the word for peace is 'shalom' meaning 'completeness', 'soundness', 'welfare' or our more general word 'peace'. This word was used by Jewish people as a form of greeting, and it is no surprise that Jesus says in this passage, 'as you enter the house, greet it.' (10:12), for the word used for such a greeting, even at a time when Aramaic was the language generally used by the people, was 'shalom'. The language of the New Testament, however, is Greek; and the word used in Greek to translate 'shalom' is 'eirene' (from which we get the name 'Irene'). This word is more simple, and means lack of discord or strife, and instead of thinking of this as an alternative idea of peace, it is more likely that Matthew thought of this as adding to the broad idea of peace already possessed within the Jewish community, inherited through the word 'Shalom'.

The test proposed by Jesus was simple. A household worthy of receiving the Gospel and its missionaries was one which exhibited every form of peace, including the idea of generosity, welfare, soundness and lack of discord. In addition to this, Jesus said that a further test of worthiness was whether a household was willing to hear what the disciples had to say (10:14). If they did, all well and good, but if not, then the disciples should not stay where they were, but move on! There would only be one chance to hear the good news and accept the Kingdom, such was the urgency of the task. Specifically, if a place of hospitality rejected God's message, then the disciples were to 'shake the dust from their feet' (10:14). This well known expression probably comes from the practice of offering a travelling stranger the facilities to wash their feet, and put simply, if such facilities were not provided, then dust remaining on the feet was evidence of an inhospitable welcome, and should be brushed off as a sign of rejection before moving on!

The final picture of rejection of the Gospel is that of 'Sodom and Gomorrah'. These cities had broken God's laws of hospitality (Genesis 19:24ff) by seeking to abuse Lot and his family and the angelic visitors they had taken in who had come to see what was happening in the city. Abraham had interceded for the city, knowing that Lot lived there (Gen 18:16f.),

but it reaped the reward of a terrible judgement on its sin. Ever since, the names of Sodom and Gomorrah have been equated with judgement, as they are in this passage.

There is much to learn from this passage, but we each need to respond to its challenge. In every age good Christian folk have sought to model their work for the Lord on the pattern of this chapter of Matthew and the other similar passages in the new Testament. The starting place for doing the Lord's work and preaching the Gospel, however, is willingness to be a disciple, and we should remember that disciples are not self selected, but called by God (10:2-4). If we then respond to the call, will we go and do what Jesus wants? Then, if we will do this, will we proclaim the Gospel in the way that Jesus wants us to do (see 10:5-10), and will we stay only as long as the Lord tells us (today's passage)?

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. To what extent does the Christian church use or need this advice today for its work of mission?
2. Discuss in your group what form of 'shaking the dust off your feet' is culturally relevant today, to indicate that hostility has been rejected?
3. How do we know when someone is genuinely peaceful towards us, and when they are not?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

The picture presented in this passage is of God's people on the move, actively doing something for the proclamation of the Gospel. I find this very challenging because by and large, the church congregations that I visit do not do anything about the proclamation of the Gospel to which this passage could possibly relate, and some do not think this is a problem either! I pray that the Lord will always make me ready to go anywhere to preach His Word, according to my ability so to do.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Pray and fast for the mission of the church to follow in the footsteps of the first disciples, so that people might learn how to communicate the Gospel.*
- *Discuss with your own family or those with whom you live whether your own home is one which is welcoming towards the Gospel. Imagine yourself not as a travelling preacher, but as one entrusted to receive the Word!*

Final Prayer

Within the pressures of everyday life, help me, heavenly Father, to rise triumphant in my faith over every adversity and give You the glory for every defeat of the evil one which I achieve or witness. May I be so victorious over the enemy that I have no fear of him!
AMEN