

# Lesson 5 | December 31, 2023

## The Christ-Sent Life

**Study Text:** Matthew 10:1–42

**Central Truth:** Being sent by Christ is a high privilege and serious responsibility.

**Key Verse: Matthew 10:16**

Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves (KJV).

“Look, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. So be as shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves” (NLT).

**Learning Objectives:**

- Students will embrace their responsibility to represent Jesus on earth.
- Students will evaluate their level of commitment to Jesus.
- Students will boldly share the gospel with lost people.

## Introducing the Study

**Say:** Jesus called twelve men to be His closest followers, who came to be called *apostles* (meaning “sent ones” or “delegates”). Matthew 10 records Jesus’ instructions to the Twelve for the mission He was sending them on. As we carry out the same mission and proclaim the gospel today, His teachings provide the guidance we need.

**Opening Activity—A Story to Share**

*Ask: What person has had the greatest influence on your life? Share a thirty-second story about that person.*

**Say:** It was probably easy to share a story about someone who greatly impacted your life. Sharing the gospel is as simple as telling the story of your relationship with Jesus. Our mission is to help people find the narrow gate that leads to life. It often involves forming relationships that open doors to conversation. Telling others how blessed we are to be part of the Kingdom may cause them to be interested in following Jesus as well. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In today’s lesson, we will look at the missional plan Jesus handed down to the disciples. In addition to preparing the Twelve for their immediate mission to a limited audience, Jesus also gave clear instructions for the ongoing evangelistic task assigned to His followers throughout history and until He returns.

Like the disciples, Jesus sends us to announce, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 10:7, KJV). And like the disciples, we will encounter persecution and hardship as we obediently take up our crosses and follow Jesus (verse 38). But if we give up our lives for Him—going wherever He sends us—we are promised life eternal (verse 39).

# Part 1—Sent by Christ

## Christ’s Ambassadors

Matthew 10:1–10

**Say:** One of the most sought-after positions in any government is the role of international ambassador. Carrying the authority of their home government, ambassadors speak, advocate, and even negotiate on their nation’s behalf. As Christians, we are Kingdom ambassadors and represent Jesus to the world. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

“Jesus sent out the twelve apostles” (Matthew 10:5, NLT) to take His message to the towns of Israel. Like them, Jesus commissioned us and sent out to serve as His representatives, carrying the gospel to the world.

In His specific instructions when they were dispatched for the first time, Jesus told the Twelve to focus on the Jewish population. As God’s chosen people, they were to be given the first opportunity to hear the good news “that the Kingdom of Heaven is near” (verse 7, NLT). Even throughout the Book of Acts, when the apostles visited a city, they went first to the Jews (usually in their synagogues) to give them the opportunity to turn to Jesus. Only then did they share the gospel with the Gentiles of the area.

The Jews should have been elated to hear the Kingdom was near. After all, they had been waiting centuries for the Messiah’s arrival. However, they expected Him to establish an earthly kingdom much like King David’s. They thought their deliverer would free Israel from Roman tyranny. But this expectation was a stumbling block to the Jews. Jesus’ kingdom would not be established through rebellion or combat, but through sacrifice. “Only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death” (Hebrews 2:14, NLT).

In addition to telling them to announce the coming of His kingdom, Jesus gave His disciples the power—and the command—to perform miracles. “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cure those with leprosy, and cast out demons. Give as freely as you have received!” (Matthew 10:8, NLT). Jesus warned the apostles to not take money from the people they ministered to. The benefits of the Kingdom were not for sale. On the other hand, Jesus did not prohibit them from accepting food and shelter. Jesus taught them a worker is worthy of being compensated for his or her work. Neither the ministers nor the people to whom they ministered should exploit the other.

### **Resource Packet Item 1: The Worthy Worker**

Distribute copies of the worksheet and assign small groups to answer each of the first three questions. Allow the groups to share their takeaways, and then discuss the reflection question as a class.

### ***Discuss***

? What role do miracles play in introducing God’s kingdom to the world?

? What do you think is fair compensation for those who devote their life to Kingdom ministry?

## **Offer of Redemption**

Matthew 10:11–15

**Say:** Jesus sent the apostles to the Jews first, even though He knew some Jews would be resistant. He may also call us to be His witnesses to a tough audience. People must decide for themselves what they will do with their knowledge of the gospel—but our job is to share it. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus told His disciples to select “a worthy person” to stay with in each town they visited (Matthew 10:11, NLT)—someone with a good reputation who was receptive to the disciple and his message. They were to stay in the same place until the task in that location was finished. It was normal practice in that time and culture to offer hospitality to strangers; in fact, it was considered an honor. If the disciples had moved from house to house within one community, they would have brought shame to the household or even caused trouble among the community leaders seeking attention. So, when they left a certain house, they were to leave the town as well.

To salute a family—as Jesus instructs the disciples to do in verse 12—was to show kindness and customary signs of respect. The usual salutation of the day was the blessing, “Peace be with you.” Much more than a casual blessing, it would have been made in the name of Jesus, who had the power to bring genuine peace to their home and lives. Jesus told the apostles if the household accepted their message, the blessing of peace would remain. But if they rejected the message of the Kingdom, the blessing would be taken back, because the Prince of Peace was not welcome there.

Jesus knew His disciples would not always be received well by their fellow Jews. His priority was to give the Jews the first chance to respond to the good news, but if they refused the message, they were to no longer be treated as the chosen people of God.

Verse 14 indicates that when a household or town refused to show hospitality to the disciples or receive their message, the disciples were to “shake its dust from your feet as you leave” (NLT). This reflected a common practice of the Jews at that time. After traveling in Gentile towns or regions, they would stop and shake off the dust from their sandals before reentering the Promised Land. This is how the disciples were to treat those who rejected their message—as unbelieving Gentiles. Jesus said a town that rejected the good news would be worse off than Sodom and Gomorrah on the Day of Judgment (verse 15). It is a serious thing to reject a message from God or a messenger He has sent.

### **Discuss**

? What lessons can we learn from Jesus’ instructions to His disciples? How can we apply them to our lives?

? What is our responsibility as Jesus’ followers toward lost people?

## Part 2—Hazards of Being Sent

### Not *If*, But *When*

Matthew 10:16–20

**Say:** Jesus shifts His focus from sending the disciples on a specific mission to prophesying concerning the Great Commission. He knows the task of being His ambassador will be dangerous and wants His followers to be prepared. Jesus promises God will be with them in the midst of persecution, speaking through them to share the message of Jesus with governors and kings. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus wanted His disciples to know He was sending them into perilous situations—“as sheep among wolves” (Matthew 10:16, NLT). It was not a question of *if* they would be persecuted for His sake, but rather *when*. Today, much of the world is growing increasingly intolerant of the gospel. Many people violently and vocally oppose God, His people, and His message—just as they did in Jesus’ day.

Jesus explained how His followers should approach the dangers awaiting them: They were to be as “wise” (KJV) or “shrewd” (NLT) as snakes and as “harmless as doves” (verse 16). The Greek word for *wise* or *shrewd* means “prudent.” Rather than being conniving or underhanded, they were to be straightforward and sincere.

Jesus’ warnings were not meant to frighten His disciples—or us. Instead, He was preparing them for the opportunities persecution would bring for advancing the kingdom of heaven. When they faced the persecution, the Holy Spirit would give them the correct words to speak so the effectiveness of their witness would be maximized (verses 19–20).

#### **Discuss**

? What kind of treatment rises to the level of religious persecution?

? Have you ever experienced a dangerous or unexpected situation that opened a door to share the gospel? If so, relate the story to the class.

## The Kingdom Expands through Persecution

Matthew 10:21–25

**Say:** Persecution was common in the first century and continues today in many parts of the world. Where persecution of Christians exists, the kingdom of heaven grows. Often, this directly results from Christians fleeing and taking the gospel with them. Note that Jesus’ words in Acts 1:8—that His followers would be His witnesses everywhere, including Judea and Samaria—began to be fulfilled in Acts 8:1 because of “a great wave of persecution. . . . ; and all the believers except the apostles were scattered through the regions of Judea and Samaria” and they “preached the Good News about

Jesus wherever they went” (verse 4, NLT). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus explained to His followers that the world would hate anyone who attempted to expand His kingdom. Satan is the source of this hatred. Jesus said even family members would turn against one another because of Him. Sadly, parents have disowned their children, siblings have shunned their believing brothers and sisters, and in some parts of the world, family members have indeed betrayed one another to the point of death for accepting Christ.

Jesus did not conceal the cost of discipleship. Instead, He encouraged His followers to remain faithful when persecuted, promising that “everyone who endures to the end will be saved” (Matthew 10:22, NLT).

Persecuted Christians are not always required to keep enduring mistreatment. Jesus instructed His apostles to flee to another town if they were persecuted. Arriving in a new place would allow them to share the gospel with a new audience.

### **Resource Packet Item 2: Christian Persecution through the Ages**

Distribute copies of the information sheet and review the material with the class. Note this is merely an overview of persecution against Christians throughout history, not an exhaustive list. Pray together for Christians facing hardship and persecution around the world today.

Jesus said the Son of Man would return before all of the cities of Israel had been reached. There is debate as to His meaning, but the point is that the task of reaching lost people is still before us. We must continue sharing the gospel and inviting people into the Kingdom until Jesus returns.

### ***Discuss***

? What examples (biblical, historical, or modern) can you give that show how persecution causes the Church to grow?

? Read Acts 5:40–42. How can you see Jesus’ instructions from Matthew 10 being carried out in the apostles’ lives?

## **Part 3—Do Not Be Afraid**

### **Boldly Acknowledge Jesus**

Matthew 10:26–33

**Say:** On the Day of Judgment, those who have been faithful to God will be rewarded. No one on earth can take this reward away. Human beings may be able to destroy our bodies, but they cannot touch our eternal souls! When we face persecution to any degree, we must keep our eyes on Jesus, much like the first martyr, Stephen (Acts 7:55). Let us never be afraid or ashamed to be counted as a follower of Christ. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus wants everyone to have the opportunity to enter His kingdom. He expects His followers to confidently share the gospel with those who need to hear. Although He warned His followers that the enemy would go to any length to stop them, He did not want to instill fear in their hearts. Three times in these verses, He told the disciples, “Don’t be afraid” (Matthew 10:26, 28, 31, NLT). Fear of persecution might tempt us to compromise our message, but people who prioritize safety over truth will suffer the consequences of opposing the Kingdom. Even in the midst of persecution, Christians can take comfort in knowing God sees our situation. He will comfort and strengthen us.

Jesus promises, “Everyone who acknowledges me publicly here on earth, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven” (verse 32, NLT). On the other hand, anyone who denies Jesus on earth will be denied by Jesus in heaven. As He would tell His disciples near the end of His ministry, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me” (John 14:6, NLT).

### ***Discuss***

? How do you think you would respond if someone tried to force you to deny Jesus—even threatening your family?

? What prevents Christians from boldly proclaiming the gospel to the world?

## **Fully Committed**

Matthew 10:34–42

**Say:** Jesus was fully aware that people who were committed to His kingdom would experience conflict with friends and even family members. But following Jesus requires complete allegiance. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The world stands in opposition to the Kingdom. Quoting the prophet in Micah 7:6, Jesus declared that He, as the Messiah, had come to set those who followed Him against those who did not, regardless of their relationship (Matthew 10:35–36).

Jesus confronted His followers’ concerns about the cost of being His disciples. They would likely lose family relationships—and even their lives—because of their shift in allegiance from family religious tradition to the message of Christ. Following Jesus is not easy, so He wanted His followers to weigh the cost. He also wanted them to understand that paying this price would lead to fulfillment and purpose on earth and eternal life in heaven.

Opposition is often the cross believers must bear to obediently follow Christ (verse 38). It means death to self, family relationships, and a familiar lifestyle. Yet whatever a person sacrifices to follow Christ is worth it, even their own life (verse 39).

### **Resource Packet Item 3: Facing Opposition**

Distribute the worksheet, and have the class complete it. Then discuss the examples of opposition they share.

In verses 40–42, Jesus picks up the practical travel instructions of verses 11–14. He explains how valuable the disciples are to God. The Father cares about their physical welfare as they do the work of spreading the gospel. Those who receive them with hospitality and generosity—accepting their message and acknowledging the One who sent them—will take part in their reward.

### ***Discuss***

- ? In what ways does a believer take up their cross and follow Jesus?
- ? How can our response to opposition contribute to Kingdom growth?

## **What Is God Saying to Us?**

**Say:** As followers of Jesus, our primary purpose is to accurately represent Him to the world. Historically, religion has been used to control people, and many resist the gospel because they don't truly understand the freedom it brings. Satan uses the world system to trap people in all kinds of sin, but Jesus offers the only way out. Sharing this message of hope is our mission. It is why Jesus sends us out “as sheep among wolves” (Matthew 10:16, NLT). And when we obey—going wherever He sends us—He promises His strength and presence in this life and eternal rewards in the next.

## **Living It Out**

### **Ministry in Action**

- Spend additional time in prayer, asking Jesus to help you know Him better so you can accurately represent Him with your words and actions.
- Assess your willingness to stand firm when facing persecution. Determine to proclaim the gospel no matter the cost.
- Accept the responsibility of being a “sent one” and share the gospel with at least one person this week.

## **Daily Bible Readings**

Monday:

Sent to Preserve Life.  
Genesis 45:1–8

Tuesday:

Prayer to Be Sent.  
Isaiah 6:1–8

Wednesday:

Sent to Rebellious People.  
Ezekiel 2:1–7

Thursday:

The Twelve Sent.  
Luke 9:1–6

Friday:

The Seventy Sent.  
Luke 10:1–9

Saturday:

Missionaries Sent.

Acts 13:1–5