

"A GRACIOUS DISTURBANCE"

I. Introduction

- A. I love the description of the church's ministry by theologian Michael Horton at the beginning of his book *The Gospel Commission*.
1. Listen to what Horton writes there: "A gracious disturbance is at work in the world today. With the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the age to come has broken into this present evil age." [7]
 2. What an apt description of the gospel ministry that is.
 3. It is a "gracious disturbance."
 4. Things are being shaken up.
 5. The status quo of this present evil age is being confronted.
 6. Souls are being delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of God's beloved Son.
 7. Though the church's splendor is often obscured in this age by opposition and error, Christ is building his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.
- B. This is what this passage is about.
1. When Jesus sent the apostles out on this particular mission, it was a sneak preview of things to come.
 2. As we study this text today, I want us to see three things that it teaches us about the "gracious disturbance" that is being brought about through the church's gospel ministry.
 3. It is an authorized disturbance.

4. It is a welcome disturbance to some.
5. And it is a troubling disturbance to others.

II. An Authorized Disturbance

- A. In the previous chapter of Luke's Gospel, the focus was upon Jesus's power and authority.
 1. Jesus performed signs that displayed his power over nature, over demons, over disease, and over death.
 2. In this passage, we see Jesus giving power and authority to the apostles so that they can be sent out to minister in his name.
 3. "Power" refers to the ability to do something, while "authority" refers to the right to exercise that power.
 4. Jesus has given both power and authority to his church.
 5. He gives the church its officers and equips them to carry out their duties.
 6. He authorizes them to declare and apply his Word and to care for the needs of his flock.
 7. And through this empowered and authorized ministry, Jesus's power is at work in the lives of his people.
 8. As the apostle Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians, the same power that God worked when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places is at work in our lives today.
- B. The activity of the apostles in this passage shows us that the gospel ministry has the power to set people free from the tyranny of Satan.
 1. Those who are united to Christ share in his victory over Satan.

2. The forces of evil no longer have authority over you if you are a Christian.
3. Jesus has delivered you from the domain of darkness and brought you into his kingdom.
4. This is why James could say to the Christians to whom he wrote, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." (James 4:7)
5. There is an interesting reflection on this truth in C.S. Lewis' classic book *The Screwtape Letters*, where the demon Screwtape rebukes his nephew Wormwood for making a strategic error in his efforts against a young Christian.
6. Screwtape writes: "I note with great displeasure that the Enemy (God) has, for the time being, put a forcible end to your direct attacks on the patient's chastity. You ought to have known that He always does in the end, and you ought to have stopped before you reached that stage. For as things are, your man has now discovered the dangerous truth that these attacks don't last forever; consequently you cannot use again what is, after all, our best weapon - the belief of ignorant humans, that there is no hope of getting rid of us except by yielding." [105]
7. It is important for us to understand that the temptations that plague us are resistible.
8. Of course you cannot resist the devil by relying upon your own strength.
9. But you can resist him when you look to Christ in faith and believe his Word when it says that Satan will flee from you when you resist him.
10. Giving in to temptation is not inevitable for the believer.
11. You can resist.

12. God has promised that he will not let Satan have you.
 13. Believe him on this, and you will find that he is true to his Word.
 14. Jesus has bound the strong man.
 15. He is mightier than Satan, and he can save you from all of his snares.
- C. The power and authority that Jesus gave the apostles to cure diseases served to authenticate them in their office as apostles.
1. The miracles that they performed belonged to a unique era of redemptive history.
 2. That being said, these signs also testified to the fact that the gospel is the only comprehensive cure to the maladies that afflict us in this life.
 3. It is important for us to remind ourselves of this.
 4. While we can be helped in many ways by physicians, nutritionists, and other health experts, we should never think that they have the ability to prevent and overcome all forms of sickness and disease.
 5. Such thinking would be unbiblical.
 6. Disease and death have come into this world as a result of sin.
 7. That being the case, the only way we can be definitively delivered from them is by knowing Christ and the power of his resurrection.
- D. Luke tells us that Jesus sent the apostles to proclaim the kingdom of God.
1. Here is a good example of the high value that the Bible places upon preaching.
 2. This leads J.C. Ryle to say that preaching is “God’s chosen instrument for doing good to souls. By it sinners are converted,

inquirers led on, and saints built up... The pulpit is the place where the chief victories of the Gospel have always been won."

3. This is why the preaching of the Word must always be the focus of the church's ministry.
 4. It is why Christians need to avail themselves of the preached Word if they are going to grow and mature.
- E. The content of the apostles' preaching, and of all faithful preaching, is the kingdom of God.
1. What is the kingdom of God?
 2. Here is how New Testament scholar Stephen Baugh defines it:
"The kingdom of God proper is the fully eschatological new heavens and new earth inhabited by the redeemed, resurrected saints in glory and incorruptibly where the the triune God triumphantly rules supreme in the presence of his people forever." [*The Majesty on High*, 10]
 3. In its final form, the kingdom of God is paradise, which is something that lies ahead in the future, something that will not be consummated until the second coming of Christ.
 4. At the same time, Jesus and the apostles proclaimed the arrival of the kingdom of God all the way back in the first century.
 5. This tells us that the kingdom was inaugurated at Christ's first coming.
 6. This is why the apostle Paul could refer to first century Christians as those "on whom the end of the ages has come." (1 Cor. 10:11)
 7. In this present age, the kingdom is made manifest through Christ's redemptive reign in the lives of his people.

8. This is why the Westminster Confession says that the visible church “is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.” [25.2]
9. The kingdom that is yet to come in its consummate form is advancing in this age through the preaching of the gospel.

III. A Welcome Disturbance

- A. The second thing that I want us to see in this text is that the message of the kingdom is a welcome disturbance to some.
 1. We see this in Jesus’s instruction to the apostles not to bring extra supplies with them on this particular mission.
 2. It is interesting that Jesus gave them different instructions when he spoke with them on the night of his betrayal.
 3. At that time he said to them, “But now let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack. And let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one.” (Lk. 22:36)
 4. The reason for these different instructions was the different contexts in which they were given.
 5. After Jesus’s death, the apostles would be called to go far and wide in their disciple-making mission.
 6. But here, as we are told in the parallel in Matthew’s Gospel, they were only being sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.
 7. The outward members of the covenant people were being given an opportunity to receive their King.
 8. Jesus told the apostles that their needs would be met by those who were receptive to their ministry.
- B. This basic principle remains true today.

1. Those who receive the gospel message are expected to support those who serve in the gospel ministry.
 2. As the apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9, “those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.”
 3. This principle is more significant than we may realize.
 4. It means every Christian has an important role in the gracious disturbance that is being brought about by the gospel.
 5. We are all partners in the gospel ministry.
 6. The thing that causes church plants to get started, the thing that enables local churches to flourish and grow, is the sacrifice and service and commitment of ordinary believers.
 7. Church officers can only be fruitful in carrying out their duties when they receive the cooperation, support, and encouragement of church members.
- C. I think there is one other important lesson that can be drawn from this part of the text and applied to the church in every age.
1. It has to do with the fact that Jesus told the apostles to travel light on this mission.
 2. Their focus was not to be upon tending to their worldly needs but upon doing the work of the ministry.
 3. Now, only a small percentage of Christians are called to have the gospel ministry as their vocation.
 4. However, all Christians are called to seek first God’s kingdom and to keep a loose hold on this world.
 5. We should all travel light as we sojourn as strangers and exiles on the earth.

6. We should welcome the disturbance that the gospel brings to the cares and pleasures of life.
7. We need to remember these words of the psalmist in Psalm 73:
“Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

IV. A Troubling Disturbance

- A. This brings us to our third and final point: the fact that the gospel ministry is a troubling disturbance to some.
 1. Jesus does not want the apostles to be surprised by the fact that some in Israel will not receive them.
 2. This is a theme that emerges elsewhere in the Gospels.
 3. In John 15 Jesus tells his disciples, “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.” (John 15:18–19 ESV)
 4. In that passage, Jesus speaks of being hated and persecuted by the world on his account.
 5. Here in Luke 9, Jesus only speaks of not being received by people.
 6. At the end of the day though, there is not really any difference between hating Christ’s messengers and not receiving them.
 7. There is no neutral stance toward Jesus.
 8. To fail to receive his gospel is to hate and reject him.
- B. Jesus told the apostles that when people did not receive them they were to leave that town and shake the dust from their feet as a testimony against

those people.

1. This was a public rebuke and a sign of judgment against the nation of Israel.
 2. Strict Jews would shake the dust from their feet when they left Gentile regions.
 3. When the apostles did the same thing in these Jewish cities, they were saying that those who reject the Messiah are cut off from the covenant people and from the kingdom of God.
 4. Though these people were Jews in the ethnic sense, they did not belong to the true, spiritual Israel if they rejected Israel's Messiah.
- C. Luke mentions one individual who was especially troubled by the announcement of the kingdom.
1. That individual was Herod the tetrarch.
 2. This was Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, who was ruler over Galilee.
 3. Herod was perplexed about the things that Jesus and his apostles were doing.
 4. The message that these men were preaching was strikingly similar to the message that had been preached by John the Baptist.
 5. Perhaps Herod's conscience was troubling him as he considered this.
 6. It certainly should have been troubling him, since he had unjustly put John to death.
 7. Herod wondered who this Jesus was, and he was hearing all sorts of answers to that question.

8. He wanted to see Jesus for himself, not because he was receptive to his message, but because he was threatened by the disturbance that it was making.
9. This is how those who will not receive Christ respond to the announcement of the coming of his kingdom.
10. The same message that brings joy to the hearts of some is a source of irritation in the hearts of others.

V. Conclusion

- A. We live in a dark and decaying world, but darkness and death will not prevail forever.
- B. The light of life has already dawned, and in this present evil age the church is pointing people to a better country, a heavenly one.
- C. This gracious disturbance will continue to disturb this world until the day of glory is finally at hand.
- D. Oh, how we should long for that day!
- E. As we will sing in a few moments,

*The sands of time are sinking,
The dawn of heaven breaks,
The summer morn I've sighed for,
The fair sweet morn awakes;
Dark, dark hath been the midnight,
But dayspring is at hand,
And glory, glory dwelleth
In Emmanuel's land.*