

# **The Mission of the Twelve (Matthew 10:5-15): A Guide and Challenge to Christian Ministers in Nigeria**

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## **Abstract**

The Mission text of Matt 10:5-15 on Jesus' missionary instruction to the Twelve stands as the foundational guide for Christian evangelical ministry. The choice of the Twelve for the address, later expanded by Luke to seventy disciples, sets the apostles apart for the mission. They were given specific instruction with authority to dispense Jesus' saving ministry of healing the sick, casting out devils and announcing the dawn of the kingdom of God. They were to be guided in their conduct too, characterised by reasonable detachment from possessions to meet the urgency of the gospel. The text roundly challenges Christian ministers to face the task of evangelisation to which the Lord sends them with proper disposition and discipline for a fruitful spiritual harvest.

**Key words:** Mission, the Twelve, ministry, ministers, apostles

## **0. Introduction**

Ministry, ordinarily, translates the Greek word, *diakonai*, and the Latin word, *ministrare*, and refers to service to God's people. It also translates the Hebrew word, *sarat*, meaning cultic or secular service to the people.<sup>1</sup> Thus, we can also talk of priestly or prophetic ministry. The concept of ministry existed in the Old Testament and New Testament, but with remarkable difference. As Carolyn Osiek observes:

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<sup>1</sup> John Reuman, "Minister, Ministry", in David Noel. Freedman et al (eds.), *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*. (Cambridge, W. B. Eerdmans.2000), 902.

Ministry, in the Christian-sense, is not a developed idea in the OT. Its meaning is generally interchangeable with the idea of service and confined to the Liturgical service of the Tabernacle, and later the Temple. It is, therefore, normally applied to men of priestly families, who took turns performing the various services connected with Temple sacrifices. Several texts also suggest the Ministry of women at the Tabernacle or Temple gates and perhaps in the choir (Exod 38:8, 1 Sam 2:22).<sup>2</sup>

Also, “NT ministry is service to the community in the name of Christ, whether through the performance of hospitality and physical nurturing at meals, or through spiritual nurturing of teaching and the exercise of leadership”.<sup>3</sup>

In the words of John Reumann, “the ministry of Jesus set the pattern for development of post-Resurrection ministers in the churches. Jesus’ work as teacher, prophet, and healer was taken up, under the Spirit, by itinerant teachers, prophets and exorcists. He had sent out 12 chosen followers to preach and cure the sick (Mark 6:7 par). These “sent-forth ones” (*apostoloi*) became “apostles” (Act 1:21-22), a larger group than “the Twelve” (1 Cor 15:5, 7)”.<sup>4</sup>

The text of Matt 10:5-15, on the mission of the Twelve, stands at the foundation of Christian ministry. It is to be viewed as one of the foundation texts with the initial proclamation of Jesus in Matthew 5-7, followed by sets of miracles in Matthew 8 and 9, then comes the call and sending of Apostles, followed by some parables and miracles, and other teaching materials,

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<sup>2</sup> Carolyn Osiek, “Ministry”, in Carroll Stuhlmueller *et al* (eds.), *The Collegeville Pastoral Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 623.

<sup>3</sup> Carolyn Osiek “Ministry”, 624.

<sup>4</sup> John Ruemann, “Minister, Ministry”, 902

till the passion and resurrection. Given its importance in the Synoptic tradition, it also has foundational value in the life of the ministers of Jesus, namely Apostles, disciples and His ministers today. Christian ministers today, like the Apostles (Matt 10:1-16; Mark 6:7-13; Luke 10:1-24), are thus instructed on the basic and essential dispositions for exercising the Christian ministry of spreading the Gospel as Jesus Christ himself directed. The text is to be viewed against the practice of spreading the Christian faith in the Gospel by Christian ministers in Nigeria.

Observing the Christian ministry as exercised by Christian ministers in Nigeria, one is amazed at the magnitude of the incongruence of the practice of some Christian ministers with the Gospel precepts and instructions of the Lord Jesus Christ. The instructions dwell on the urgency of the Christian ministry or mission (10:5-8a), the detachment from wealth and other distractions (10:8b-10), focus on the real exercise of the ministry in liberating the overburdened, and holistic proclamation of the kingdom of God among the people (10:11-15). The question that arises and which this article sets out to answer is: “how faithful are Christian ministers to these instructions from the Master and owner of the vineyard or the harvest? What can be done to return to the right course? What are the consequences?

## **1. Ministers and Ministries in Nigeria**

Nigeria passes for a religiously vibrant society, with its teeming population of diverse Christian denominations and religious bodies of various persuasions. Indeed, it is said that Africans are deeply religious persons, and Nigeria ranks high on this description. High rise and expansive churches dot the Nigerian landscape; with crusade and camp grounds. Healing of the sick is claimed by many pastors. Schools and hospitals

and charity organizations operated by the churches and Christian bodies abound as various forms of Christian ministry.

However, this apparent rich harvest of souls is not without many unspeakable short comings; ranging from the personal comportment of the ministers to brazenness in the exercise of the ministry, even a departure from the instructions of Jesus, to outright fakeness and counterfeit practices in the name of Christian ministry. Some Christian ministers are alleged to consult native doctors and get involved in idolatrous and unchristian rituals either to procure healings or acquire material wealth. Some indulge in sorcery, witchcraft, necromancy, and all sorts of diabolical spiritual practices that the Lord described as “abomination of the nations” (Deut 19:9-14).

When you come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you must not learn to imitate the abhorrent practices of those nations. No one shall be found among you who makes a son or daughter pass through fire or who practices divination, or is a soothsayer or an augur, or a sorcerer, or one who casts spells or who consults ghosts from the dead. For whoever does these things is abhorrent to the Lord...

In the words of B. A. C. Obiefuna, “An overview of the religious situation in Nigeria suggests that the recent socio-economic and political situation has been a symptomatic of the endemic plurality of Nigeria’s religious landscape. The country is now a procreant ground for all kinds of religious movements, especially within the Christian faith”.<sup>5</sup> Assessing

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<sup>5</sup> B. A. C. Obiefuna, *Issues in Religion and Society* (Okpuno: Fides 2018), 73

the costs and benefits of the proliferation of Religious movements, he states:

The establishment of new independent churches in our contemporary Nigerian society has been an instrument of disintegration in our society. Due to the existence of some new religious movements, some parents now find it very difficult to curb the religious zeal of their children. In some families, as the case may be, some of their children had decamped from their parents' churches. No one can doubt whether this is surely a source of family disintegration in our society. More worrisome is the fact that the larger society is now polarized along denominational lines. There is no gainsaying the fact that Christians are now against fellow Christians in any political or even socio-economic contest.<sup>6</sup>

Ignatius Obinwa, writing on the negative aspect of Pentecostalism in Nigeria says:

Within Pentecostalism in Nigeria today, however, there are many unhealthy practices which should not be emulated. For instance, the Pentecostals have morbid craze for spiritual experiences. There is overemphasis on miracles, visions, dreams and prophecies. This often leads both the ministers and members to announcing false visions and deceptive revelations. Some Pentecostal ministers engage in arranging false testimonies of miracles received, some stage managing the miracles in order to remain relevant. The fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible by Pentecostal ministers is not healthy to their listeners. There is no

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<sup>6</sup> Obiefuna, *Issues in Religion and Society*, 73

gainsaying the fact that the unwholesome and unchristian practices by some Nigerian Christian ministers bring disrepute to Christian mission in Nigeria.<sup>7</sup>

## **2. Background of the Text.**

Matt 10:5-15 falls within the second of the five-discourse structured outline of the Gospel of Matthew: Sermon on the Mount, Missionary discourse, parables of the kingdom, community discourse, and eschatological discourses. It is properly called instruction on mission, preceding warning against opposition, and cost of discipleship. Donald Senior sums up the text thus:

The instruction details the identity between Jesus own ministry and that of the twelve. They are to go only to the lost sheep of Israel. They are to proclaim the dawn of the kingdom (4:17). They are to continue the same works of compassion and reconciliation. Like Jesus himself (cf 8:20) the missionary is to travel light and is not to expect a salary for his work. (v. 8). he is to depend on the hospitality of Christian households as he moves from town to town<sup>8</sup>.

Benedict T. Viviano identifies the chapter as “missionary discourse (1-42) comprising:

- A. Mission of the Twelve Apostles (10:1-4).
- B. The commissioning of the twelve (10:5-16).

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<sup>7</sup> Obinwa Ignatius, “Pentecostalism and the Ministry of Catholic Priests in Nigeria Today: A Perspective from Joel 2:28-29, in *Ministerium*, vol 4, 2018,

<sup>8</sup> Donald Senior, “Invitation to Matthew” in *Invitation to the Gospels* (New York: Paulist Press, 2002), 44

- C. How to face future persecutions (10:17-25).
- D. Appropriate and inappropriate fear (10:26-31).
- E. Confessing Jesus before People (10:32-39).
- F. Rewards of discipleship (10:40-42).<sup>9</sup>

The chapter stands as a different pericopé by theme as the previous chapters 8 and 9 dwelt on some healing miracles of Jesus, preceded by the great opening discourse of Sermon on the Mount (5-7).

The text itself has the content as outlined above by Viviano. Besides the instruction and sending out on Mission as Apostles (*apostello*), there are also instructions to anticipate and withstand persecution and opposition, appropriate and inappropriate fear (whom to fear, and whom not to fear), as well as values and rewards of confessing Jesus. Chapter 11 goes off from the commissioning scene to other intervening issues on John the Baptist, woes to unrepentant cities, return of disciples or apostles from mission (11:25-30) and Sabbath controversy. Chapter 10 is, therefore, heavily focused as missionary text that is all time relevant to ministers, not ignoring other texts. “This periscope serves, along with 9:36-38, to introduce the second great discourse of the Gospel, the missionary discourse to the twelve apostles”.<sup>10</sup>

### **3. The Text in the Synoptic Tradition**

The text is a three-tradition text, witnessed by the three Synoptic Gospels (Matt 10:1-15; Mark 6:6b-13, Luke 9:1-6, 10:1-12). It often goes with the text on the election of the apostles. Matthew specifically put the two events together; that is, the election of the apostles (Matt 10:1-4) and the

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<sup>9</sup> Benedict T. Viviano, “The Gospel According to Matthew”, in Raymond E. Brown *et al* (eds.), *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Geoffery Chapman, 1995), 650-652.

<sup>10</sup> Viviano, “The Gospel According to Matthew”, 650.

sending out on mission (Matt 10:5-42). Mark has the call and enumeration of the apostles in chapter 3:13-19, while the missionary text is in chapter 6:6b-13. Luke has the mission text of the twelve apostles in chapter 9:1-6 but has an additional sending of the seventy in chapter 10:1-12. Commenting on this, Filip Noel writes: “Seventy (two) disciples are given the task of putting Jesus’ teaching on discipleship into practice. They receive the same mission as the Twelve in 9:1-6. This doublet which suggests the use of two sources has been consciously willed by Luke, not in the least from his universalistic interest. The preaching of the kingdom of God is not limited to the Twelve”.<sup>11</sup> Thus the mission text is so important that the three synoptic Gospels recorded it, and Luke even extended it to more disciples besides the Twelve. Thus, it can also apply to disciples of all climes and times, including Nigerian disciples and ministers of today.

#### **4. Exegesis of the Text (Matt 10:5-15).**

The chapter is already delimited as mission text with identity of the apostles by name covering in verses 1-4. The text itself may be structured as follows:

- ❖ Spatial limitation of Mission (5-6).
- ❖ Identification and Specification of Mission (7-8a).
- ❖ Conditions of mission (8b-12).
- ❖ -Consequences of rejection of mission (12-15).

##### **i. Spatial Limitation of Mission:**

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<sup>11</sup> Filip Noel, “Luke”, in *The International Bible Commentary* (William R. Farmer, ed.; Bangalore, TPI), 2004, 1474.



Jesus limited the first Apostles and disciples (Luke 10) on mission as preparatory to the places he would visit and within the boundaries of his own immediate salvific mission. In the words of Adrian Leske, “twelve disciples are chosen to represent Israel, gathering together the twelve tribes to be a light to the nations (Isa 49:6). The authority they are given is to demonstrate the restorative power of the reign of God, just as Jesus has exercised this authority in his word (7:29) and deed (9:6-8, 21:23-27).<sup>12</sup> He further explains:

The twelve are sent out with the explicit charge to go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, Jesus’ immediate purpose. His mission so far has been to announce the good news of the kingdom and to gather the faithful Israel together to carry out its purpose to be a people-covenant and a light to the nations. The twelve are now to participate in this proclamation and gathering, so at this stage they are told: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans”...<sup>13</sup>

Given the universal scope of salvation that God designs to achieve through Him, the Lord Jesus began this salvation project with Israel as steppingstone and launching pad for universal redemption, just as God raised Israel as a nation, through one Man, Abraham (Gen 12:1-3). God’s universal scheme of salvation began, in His wisdom, among the people He chose for Himself and through them to others. The Apostles follow this scheme adopted by Jesus Himself on His instruction to them. Scholars observe that, “this is the only

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<sup>12</sup> Adrian Leske, “Matthew”, in *The International Bible Commentary, An Ecumenical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century* (William R. Farmer *et al.*; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Bangalore: TPI, 2004), 1354

<sup>13</sup> Adrian Leske, “Matthew”, 1354

time Matthew uses the term, ‘Apostles’ (sent ones), relating to Jesus sending them out”.<sup>14</sup>

Again, the phrase, “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (*ta probata ta apololota oikou Israel*) gives the pathetic condition of the sheep, otherwise, the House of Israel, that is “lost” (*apololota*), threatened by poverty and disease, oppression and marginalization, on account of whom Jesus was anointed and sent to bring the Gospel to them (Luke 4:16-21).

## **ii. Identification and Specification of Mission (7-8a):**

“As you go, proclaim the good news ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near? Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons’”. Jesus spells out the work that the Apostles were sent out to do in the authority he had given to them (10:1). They were to do the very work He himself did and came to do (Luke 4:16-21). They were to be his true representatives, his other self, by His own divine power, which he had bestowed on them for this very purpose of liberation and restoration of the human person; the salvation of body and soul. “The twelve are to be like their teacher (vs 7-8) and go through the towns and villages of Israel as heralds announcing and demonstrating the kingdom, bringing about the restoration of communion with God in preparation for the coming of the Son of man (10:23). In the words of Donald Senior, “They are to continue the same works of compassion and reconciliation”.<sup>15</sup>

## **iii. Conditions of mission – (8b-12):**

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<sup>14</sup> Adrian Leske, “Matthew”, 1354.

<sup>15</sup> Senior, “Invitation to Matthew”, 44.

*“You received without payment, give without payment. Take no gold or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics or sandals or staffs, for labourers deserve their food. Whatever town or village you enter find out who in it is worthy and stay there until you leave. As you enter the house, greet it”.* Jesus outlines the conditions under which he sent out His apostles to go and spread the kingdom of heaven. First, they received whatever endowments for the work without paying for it. They should not request for payment as they spread the good news by words and deeds. They were to cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and cast out devils. These works are done through the Holy Spirit that God gives His apostles for delivering His people. He further commands that as they received these powers without payment, they should not request payment when they use them to work. This request and injunction are a big challenge to ministers even today. The Church offered some safeguards to maintain this through the Evangelical counsels, but it remains how these safeguards are adopted and utilized by ministers. They are to take no staff, sandal, tunic etc. Labourers deserve their food. Can the provision of the ecclesial community suffice for the minister without shoddy deals by some ministers? Ministers have great challenges in this segment. Ministers have many things to guard against if their efforts in the work of evangelization would bear fruit. They were to carry no bag, rather they would trust in the Lord for their provision and on the charity and goodwill of the faithful in the Christian community. No wonder the earliest apostles (Act 6:1-7) would not leave the gospel to serve the table. “And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said it is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables” (Act 6:2). What of carrying bag, taking staff for comfort, extra money to provide for tomorrow. Should God not provide for the ministers of the word through the faithful? Ministers of the gospel need a rethink here as

they spread the Gospel and make many outrageous financial and other tangible or material demands on the community of God's people for their own personal enterprise.

Leske explains:

There is a sense of urgency to their proclamation, so they are simply to go without first procuring money and supplies (vs 9-10). God will see that they are provided for (cf 6:31-34). Jesus forbids any "commercial" use of the authority he confers on the twelve. There is no need to take a bag (used for carrying bread and other food), or two tunics as extra clothing, or sandals, or a staff- the normal equipment for a journey (cf Exodus 12:11). The prohibitions emphasize the immediacy and spontaneity of the mission and signify that in carrying out that mission the disciples put themselves totally into the hands of God to supply their needs. As they enter a house, they should greet it and remain there till they vacate the place.<sup>16</sup>

#### **iv. Consequences of rejection of mission (12-15):**

Where the apostles are well received, they should greet the house, stay there, eat whatever is set before them, enjoy whatever provisions available and do the work of bringing about the kingdom of God, with its liberation and restoration with God among them. Where they are not received, the apostles are not to go to war with the people or call down fire on them. It is not their mission to judge and condemn or fight the people. That work is left for God on the judgment day, for

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<sup>16</sup> Leske, "Matthew", 1354

whoever receives you receive me, and whoever receives me, receives Him who sent me”.

Instead, as the apostles depart from the place where they are rejected, they should shake the soil of that place off their feet as a testimony against them on the last day or Day of Judgment, when adulterous Sodom and Gomorrah would receive a better treatment than that city.

Leske clarifies further: “On entering the house of one regarded as worthy, the apostles were to ‘greet it’, meaning that they should seek the peace and welfare of the residents (cf. Gen 43:27, Judge 18:15). With the coming of the kingdom, that greeting takes on special significance. The twelve are conveyers of the messianic peace that restores relationship with God (cf. 52:7). If the people there reject the message of the kingdom, then that peace is taken back”.<sup>17</sup>

He continues:

The disciples are not to stay and argue with those who will not accept the proclamation (vs 14), but are to leave. “Shake off the dust off your feet” describes a common gesture of repudiation, a sign that those repudiated were still unregenerate (cf Acts 13:51), and liable to Judgment (13:24-39). That Judgment will be worse than the one delivered to the land of Sodom and Gomorrah, the traditional symbol of iniquity and punishment. (Gen 19:15-29, Isa 1:9, 13:19).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Leske “Matthew”, 1354

<sup>18</sup> Leske, “Matthew”, 1354

**v. Matt 10:5-15: The Text and Nigeria Christian Ministers**

Matthew 10:5-15 speaks eloquently to every Christian minister, who is involved in the ministry of spreading the Gospel, and more so in Nigeria. Given the context of aberrations noted among some Nigerian Christian ministers, a re-reading of the text is imperative on them to reset their goals and redirect their steps towards an authentic Christian ministry of the Gospel in the country. Each of the four segments of the text has something for Nigeria Christian ministers of all denominations in various ways.

Ministers have to see in the people they are sent to, a sense of “spiritual loss”. They have to observe and identify the proper problems of the congregation. Some pastors and ministers see the people as only victims of their rabid exploitation. They do not feel with the people on their problems, with a sense of metaphorical but holistic loss and need for divine restoration of the presence of the kingdom of God. Some ministers are wolves among the sheep, rather than shepherds. With sensitivity to the needs of the lost sheep of Israel, Ministers can be fired with zeal and urgency to address the particular needs of the flock. They should, therefore, be sensitive to the flock and discern their problem properly and show readiness to minister the kingdom of heaven to them by their words and deeds.

Again, the mission is specified by the Lord as: heal, cure the sick, drive out demons, proclaim that the kingdom is near, etc. The minister must open his or her mind to be used by the Lord to bring about this salvific mission to the people in their specific needs. He has to make himself available for the work in an authentic Christian way. Ministers should not be fake or employ unchristian means to exercise Christian ministry among the people. They should eschew all forms of aberration in the course of executing the Christian ministry, and imbibe

requisite discipline in the acquisition and utilization of material things. The quest for comfort among some Christian ministers goes out of proportion. Some Christian ministries are only out to make money by milking and deceiving the people. They are in the ministry only to make money and maximize their wealth at the expense of the Christian community. Some minister's count their success in the ministry, not by number of souls converted and persons liberated spiritually and economically but by material benefits. Some ministers compete with one another on their material acquisition and political influence. They throw all caution to the wind in their quest for and flaunting of material gains, becoming as it were, enemies of the cross of Christ, those whose beliefs are "their gods" (Phil 3:18-19) and their hearts are set on earthly things.

The reception of the Gospel is imperative, but the comportment of the ministers can make or mar the reception on rejection of the Gospel. If ministers live like Jesus Christ with meekness and concern for the flock, and work in the Spirit of the Master, the Gospel will be better received. Some Christians are rejecting the Gospel because of the contradictory lifestyle of the ministers.

Richard T. France observes:

If Jesus' disciples are about God's work, they may expect his provision (the worker is worth his keep) and need make no elaborate preparations for their material needs on the way; the task is too urgent. They and we should beware of a mercenary approach to Christian ministry. Necessary sustenance (rather than payment for services rendered) would be provided not by a miracle but by appropriate hospitality.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Richard T. France, "Matthew", in D. Carson *et al* (ed.), *New Bible Commentary*, 2nd ed. (Secunderabad: Authentic Books, 2000), 917.

## **5. Conclusion:**

From the foregoing, in order to align oneself on the text of Matt 10:5-15, the Nigerian Christian minister has to be conscientious in reading of scripture, and zealously committed to spreading the good news. He should be sensitive and available to the needs of the people; he should also imbibe the spirit of detachment, contentment and poverty of spirit.

Finally, this text is simply an ideal text on the elementary requirements for Christian ministers and the nature of the Christian ministry in the Bible.