

Sermon Series: “10 Words from Jesus on Sharing the Faith”
“#9 Shake: When to Do So and Not Do So?”
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Have you ever had to shake yourself free from, disassociate yourself from, something unpleasant? E.g, I recall when I was growing up, around eight years old, I was in front of my house on Filmore Ave. at night and I saw a friend coming down the sidewalk who did not see me. I decided it would be cool to scare him, so I lay down on my belly in the grass, and waited for him to come down closer to me. But, before he could come, I felt something crawling all around my abdomen, and then it started to sting me, I realized I was lying down in an ant bed! I jumped up, ran in the house, and jumped in the shower— with all my clothes on— and started to discard my shirt and everything so I could shake and brush the ants off me! That was an unpleasant experience. The next day my belly was swollen! I know what it is like to shake something off myself to get something unpleasant off, to disassociate myself from something unpleasant. You too may know that is like— whether it is dog hair or dirt, or a bad experience or someone who hurt you. Jesus warned His disciples that in following Him there would be times where shaking something unpleasant off ourselves would be necessary.

READ Matthew 10:14-15 (p. 10)

CONTEXT: Jesus was instructing the 12 disciples as they were about to go out in a mission to proclaim the Kingdom of God. He tells them not to go to the Gentiles or Samaritans, but to Israel and tell them the Kingdom of Heaven is near. They are to cure the sick, raise the dead, and do other miracles. Whenever they enter a town or village they are to find someone worthy in it and stay with them; if it is worthy let your peace come on it, Jesus said, but if it is not worthy let your peace return to you.

READ vv 14-15. “What was the situation Jesus addressed here? Cf. Luke 10:10-12; Acts 13:50-52.” This passage is found in all three synoptic gospels, and in the saying source that Matthew and Luke share called “Q”. We find the outlines of it in Mark 6:6b-13 and Luke 9:1-12, along with Luke 10:1-12. In all of these Jesus sends out His disciples on a mission, and in Mark and Luke we find they are sent out in twos. They are to proclaim that the Kingdom of God has come near and heal the sick, and in Matthew we have added to Mark that they are to raise the dead and cast out lepers. The disciples are to travel lightly (no gold or other form of money, no two tunics, no sandals, no staff), and when the disciples find a home that is worthy for them to stay, then let their blessing come on it. And the situation in our morning’s text is that the disciples and their message are rejected by those who heard it. Have you ever experienced that? E.g., I recall in the first pastorate I had. It was what was called a “two -point” charge because I pastored two congregations at two separate church buildings, about seven miles from each other. One of the churches did not like the fact that I invited children of a different race to a youth group event, so they closed down the youth event and wanted me to leave because of it, and whenever I tried to talk to them about the gospel being for all people they did not want to hear it. E.g., I recall a good friend of mine from college who was one of our group leaders, and he even wrote a

Christian song that I still recall, and he and I hung out a lot together. When I went to seminary for three years I lost touch with him, but when I returned I found out he had fallen away from the faith out of a sexual relationship with a non-believer. I tried to reach him and encourage him to come back to the faith, but he was unwilling; I recall the last time I met with him was before Hurricane Katrina, but his heart was cold toward the gospel. You too probably have had such experiences with sharing the gospel. What are we to do? Jesus has some direction for us in our text.

“The symbol of shaking the dust off one’s feet seems to be one of what a New Testament scholar aptly calls, ‘a dramatic gesture’: both a present protest and a future judgment. On Sodom and Gomorrah, cf. Genesis 19:1-25. ‘They [those in Jesus’ day] have had the benefit of a clearer call to repentance, God’s last word, and so the guilt of their failure to respond is greater. “Post-Christian” man is a different man from the heathen, to whom the Word of Jesus has not yet come . . .” (the above quotations are from R.T. France, *Matthew*, p. 181).” W.D. Davies and Dale Allison (*Matthew*, vol. 2, p. 177) state in their important commentary on Matthew that this seems to be a word that has strong evidence that it is from the historical Jesus on shaking the dust off one’s feet (v 14), since this saying has multiple attestation (it is found in Mark and Q), is from a Jewish milieu (later Jewish writings; cf. Nehemiah 5:13 for a similar idea), and is dealing with the end days (eschatological), which Jesus mentions in His teaching. It also seems clear that the instructions given here are meant by Matthew to apply to later disciples of Jesus, as Jesus goes on in Matthew 10 to mention further times of rejection and persecution and how a disciple must love Jesus above one’s family relations. But it would be too much to say that all that Jesus says here was meant for later disciples, like us today. For example, on v 8 Jesus says, “You received without payment, give without payment.” Paul says in 1 Timothy 5:18 of those who

preach and teach, “The laborer deserves to be paid”. But there are definitely general principles to apply here, and one of them is the shaking the dust off one’s feet in disassociation from those who have rejected the gospel. As Paul and Barnabas are being forced out of Psidian Antioch by the leaders of the city they shake the dust off their feet “in protest against them” (Acts 13:50-52). Similarly, Paul shakes his clothes out in front of the Jews in Corinth for their opposing him and reviling him for the gospel, and Paul goes next to the Gentiles; Acts 18:6 states, “When they [the Jews] opposed and reviled him, in protest he shook the dust from his clothes and said to them, ‘Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’” So the situation addressed in Matthew is similar to what we find in Acts— people reject both the apostles and their message of the gospel. What is important to recall is that the apostles represent Jesus, so the people’s rejection of them is also a rejection of Jesus. Note what Jesus said in Matthew 10:40, “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.” Please note that the same verb, δεχόμεαι, is used in v 14 and v 40 for “welcome, receive”. We do similar things today, where we want to disassociate ourselves from everything having to do with someone. E.g., I recall reading about a Hollywood actor who met President George W. Bush but would not shake his hand because he didn’t agree with what Bush did as a president, so the Hollywood actor wanted to stay clear of him. E.g., I recall a song from South Pacific, “I’m gonna wash that man right out of my hair/I’m gonna wash that man right out of my hair/I’m gonna wash that man right out of my hair/and send him on his way”. There is a Jewish tradition from the Midrash Ohalot 18:6 where one becomes unclean by waking in territory of Gentiles. So the idea here in our text is that when Jesus’ disciples shook the dust off their feet they were basically saying the town or house was unclean before the Lord, a heathen. Why was Jesus telling them to do this? From

the R.T. France quotation in our Sermon Notes, the idea is that with the rejection of a great grace is a great judgment. Sodom and Gomorrah were examples frequently cited in the Old Testament of the height of human depravity. It is similar, but much more tragic, when someone rejects the grace and forgiveness offered by Jesus.

“When should we shake the dust from our feet?” I recall a Christian wondering that aloud about a relationship he had with a non-believer— when is it time to shake off the dust and go focus on someone else with the gospel? We need to notice that there does not need to be a literal shaking of the dust off one’s feet— we recall Pilate in Matthew 27:24 washed his hands of the matter in Jesus’ crucifixion. I think we need to be careful here and keep two things in mind. First, we don’t want to treat people as projects— as gospel projects. I have some very close friends who are non-believers, and I hope to keep those friendships for years to come. Second, in the context, we are talking about traveling evangelists. So if someone like a Billy Graham were traveling from town to town, and one town had a negative reaction to him, he could just shake off the dust and go to another town. So then, when should we shake off the dust? Let me revisit two situations I mentioned earlier. With the first church I served, Elena and I were tempted to get out the car on I-55 as I was leaving to go to serve another church and shake off the dust; God made it clear it was time to move on as one of the two churches I served no longer wanted me and the Bishop had assigned me elsewhere, which was a church that was extremely receptive to the gospel. Second, with my good friend from college, he was moving in a different social circle and really wanted nothing much to do with me, so I could tell the Lord wanted me symbolically shake off the dust, and I did, and I have talked to him perhaps only once or twice since then, both times with me initiating a conversation by calling him. This is similar to what Jesus is saying— no only are they rejecting the message of the gospel, but to

some extent you and me as well. But if someone is not interested in the gospel at all, but they want to be your friend, I would encourage you to keep that friendship, but also develop other relationships for the gospel. I have been surprised where over time friends have developed an interest in the gospel. If you are married to a non-believer who has no interest in following Jesus and the non-believer wants to stay in the marriage, then certainly stay in the marriage and fulfill your vows and love your spouse unconditionally, and pray for him or her. We are not to shake the dust off our feet in that situation. And remember that dating for Christians is not for evangelism, but for finding a life-long mate with whom to serve the Lord, so Christians are to date only those who are fellow believers. And remember as we make friends with unbelievers we are to love them as friends regardless of their acceptance of the gospel— we are never to try to manipulate them— and we are to speak clearly the gospel if and when they are willing to hear it from us. And pray the Holy Spirit to act! Allow the Holy Spirit to guide us when it is time to shake the dust off our feet and move on, and pray the Holy Spirit will bring someone else to share the gospel with them.