

Jesus: A Gospel-Preaching, Compassionate, Harvester

Scripture: Matthew 9:35-38

Sermon Series: Matthew

Topic: Jesus, Compassion, Shepherds, Harvest

Matthew 9:35-38 (ESV)

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³⁵ And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸ therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

Introduction

As we have been following Matthew's account of the life and ministry of Jesus, since the Sermon on the Mount, which began in chapter five, we have watched him highlight Jesus' authority. Matthew has given us abundant evidence to the fact that Jesus' authority is unmatched. There is no one like him. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, the people were "*astonished at the teaching of Jesus because he taught with authority,*" unlike any other teacher in all of Israel (Mt 7:28-29). The word of Jesus was powerful and authoritative. Matthew has held out before us the evidence of the incredible teaching authority of Jesus. He wants us to see this.



But not only was Jesus' authority seen in his word, but it was also seen in works. Jesus' authority extended over the realms of both disease and demons. From the beginning of

chapter 8 to the end of chapter 9, Matthew has given us 10 miracles¹ that demonstrate the unparalleled authority of Jesus. And when the crowds of people saw all of these works of Jesus, they were astonished and said, as we saw last week, "*Never was anything like this seen in Israel*" (9:33). The crowds marveled at Jesus.

But the Pharisees maligned him. "But the Pharisees said, '*He casts out demons by the prince of demons*'" (9:34). The spiritual leaders of the Jews heard the same teaching of Jesus that the crowds heard, they saw the same miracles that the crowds saw, and yet they did not come to the same conclusion about Jesus as did the crowds. The Pharisees instead condemned Jesus as a servant of Satan.

This willful rejection of Jesus by the Pharisees marks a transition in Matthew's gospel. He will address this issue more fully later, but this paragraph that was just read to us (i.e. 9:35-28) is a transitional paragraph. It marks a movement in the advancement of the Kingdom of heaven that has broken into the world through Jesus.

Up to this point in the gospel, Jesus has been the only actor in advancing the kingdom. That will change going forward. Now Matthew will show us how *Jesus aims to advance the kingdom of heaven through a new set of leaders*. The old leaders are unfit for the new kingdom. Thus, new leaders are needed in order to advance a new kind of kingdom.

Transition: Kingdom Movement (v.35)

The transition begins with v.35.

Matthew 9:35 (ESV) And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.

We've heard these words before. What Matthew wrote in verse 9:35 is almost exactly the same as what he wrote immediately before recording the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 4:23 (ESV) And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.

In chapter four, this summary statement introduced what Matthew revealed about the authoritative word and work of Jesus. Here he will do the same, but the difference will be that Jesus begins to share that authority.

¹ 1) the leper (8:1-4), 2) a paralyzed man (8:5-13), 3) Peter's feverish mother-in-law (8:14-15), 4) calming a storm (8:23-27), 5) casting out a herd of demons (8:28-34), 6) both forgiving sin and healing paralytic (9:1-8), 7) woman with the issue of blood (9:20-22), 8) raising the dead girl (9:24-26), 9) two blind men (9:27-30), and 10) mute demon-oppressed man (9:32-33).

Optional: Emerging Pattern

There is a pattern emerging. At the beginning of chapter 4 Jesus was the wilderness being attacked by the devil. After this time of testing, Jesus Matthew offers this summary statement (4:23) to describe the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. At the beginning of a more detailed account of Jesus' ministry, Matthew began with these words, "*Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him*" (5:1). Then Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount, which resulted in the people being astonished at the authority of his teaching (7:28-29).

Here at the end chapter 9, the Pharisees are the means of the attack, by falsely charging Jesus as being a servant of Satan, and again we have an almost identical summary statement (9:35), which is followed by the words, "*When he saw the crowds...*" (9:36), that then leads into a new phase of Jesus' ministry where he advances the scope of his ministry by calling the Twelve disciples and sending them out into the world with his authority to teach, preach, and to heal.

The pattern is there is an attack on Jesus, a summary by statement by Matthew, Jesus sees the crowds, and then there is an advance in ministry and mission.

Teaching, Preaching, and Healing (v.35)

Notice the three-fold expression of Jesus' ministry; teaching, preaching the gospel, and healing. That is what Jesus did everywhere he went. **Teaching** is instructing people in the truth, **preaching** is proclaiming that the truth is connected with the gospel and then calling for a right response, and **healing** is proof that the teaching is truth and the gospel is worthy of a right response. All three work together.

The Gospel of the Kingdom

What is the gospel of the kingdom? What would Jesus have been teaching and preaching? I suspect it would be something like this,

God created this world and all was very good. Yet Satan deceived man (i.e. Eve and Adam) and thus sin, death, and the curse entered God's good world. As a consequence, God and man were permanently separated. Yet God is merciful and so he promised to send a savior and a redeemer to recover that which was lost. The fulfillment of God's great and gracious promises, though long delayed, have now begun. God's anointed Redeemer has now arrived.

Therefore, repent of your sins. Turn back to God. He is merciful and gracious. He will forgive your sins and he will receive you. There is no sin stronger than the grace of God. There is no sin greater than his grace. There is no spiritual stronghold that he is unable to wipe out with a word. Believe in him today. Do not disobey, but obey his will and his

word and you will find acceptance, love, adoption, forgiveness, grace, restoration, and even eternal life with him in his heavenly kingdom.

When Jesus would have been preaching the gospel of the kingdom, his saving and redeeming work was not yet complete. However, we now live on the other side of his saving and redeeming work which has been completed. So what is different about the gospel of the kingdom that we should now teach and preach?

God created
Man sinned
God cursed and cast out
God promised a new route

God called
Man stalled
Father sent
Son went
John cried, "Repent!"

Messiah arrived
Enemies contrived
Jesus died
Mary cried

Sin atoned
Satan dethroned
Third day Jesus rose again
Heaven took him in
Jesus sat down
Devil frowned

Holy Spirit poured out
Heaven gave a shout!
Sinners born again
Christ's Church did begin

Curse undone
God and man now one
Judgment is sure
Will you endure?

Believe in the Son
Confess Jesus as the One

Gladly bend your knee
Eternally you'll be free

Jesus taught that the kingdom of heaven had broken in on the kingdom of earth. God's power had begun to permeate this cursed and broken world through the unparalleled authority of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus taught that kingdom of heaven had come, he called for repentance of sin and an obedient response to this truth, and he healed every disease and every affliction as proof that what he was teaching was in fact true. This teaching, this preaching, and this healing power was about to grow and expand even more.

Jesus Saw Crowds: Moved with Compassion (v.36)

Matthew now focuses our concentration from a general statement about Jesus and his ministry to a particular response of Jesus himself.

Matthew 9:36 (ESV) When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

When he saw the crowds. Matthew is watching Jesus watch the crowds. Jesus looked out over the people, but he did not overlook people. He paid attention to them. And he responded to what he saw. In fact, he was inwardly moved by what he saw.

He had compassion for them. The word '*compassion*,' means "to experience great affection for; to be deeply moved in the core of one's being." ² The root word literally refers to the "entrails; bowels, which were regarded as the seat of emotions." ² It refers to the very center and core of our body and our being. This verb is exclusively used of Jesus or by Jesus in his parables. ³ It is never used of any man, but only of the attitude and actions of Jesus towards people. This means that Jesus possess a unique kind and degree of affection and compassion for people which we do not experience. As Messiah, Jesus was deeply moved in his inward person when he looked out upon the crowds of his day (i.e. the people of the world).

We see this kind of deep compassion and love in Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus when he saw Mary and the crowd that was with her weeping with grief and we are told that Jesus "was deeply moved in his spirit" and then he too began to weep (Jn 11:33-35). When Jesus saw the crowds of people and he consider their true condition, he was moved with compassion. Isaiah foretold this of the Servant/Messiah saying—as I discovered in my daily reading this morning—

"he who has pity on them will lead them...For the LORD has comforted his people and will have compassion on his afflicted." (Isaiah 49:10, 13)

² Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Logos edition, v.36.

³ Ibid.

What do you experience when you look out at the crowds of the world? Are you moved with compassion and affection? Or are you moved with revulsion and disgust? When you look at the crowds of the world are you irritated and annoyed? Or are you moved with pity and weeping for the lost condition they are in? Are people viewed by you as an impediment to what you really want or a means by which you can get what you want? Notice that Jesus sees the true condition of the crowds of the world.

They were harassed and helpless. The word '**harassed**' carries the notion of "bullied and oppressed,"⁴ as well as meaning, "to trouble, tear, mangle, or flay." The word '**helpless**,' means "to throw off, hurl, or cast down," which means they are "unable to rescue themselves or escape their tormentors."⁵ Their situation is desperate. Jesus looks at the crowds as being completely dependent upon another in order to free them from those who are harassing them. They are helpless unless some compassionate someone intervenes on their behalf.

Who is oppressing them? Who was harassing them? This is certainly a reference to demonic oppressors, but it also includes the Pharisees who "**tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them upon people's shoulders,**" while they are unwilling to move them with even one finger (Mt 23:4). The religious leaders were those who should have been helping the people, but they were not. The spiritual leaders of the people should have been offering spiritual help and support, but they were doing just the opposite. They were making things worse.

Like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus viewed the crowds like sheep that had no shepherd. Sheep are defenseless animals. They have no natural ability to defend themselves. They are easy prey for predators. Unless they are defended by the shepherd, any number of predators can consume them.

We, **like sheep, are sometimes our own worst enemy.** Their own abundant wool cover their own eyes so that they cannot even see where they are going. No wonder they need some help to both defend themselves. Sheep are even unable to find good food for themselves. They need to be led to good ground by someone who knows the way to get to it. Shepherds are necessary for the survival of sheep.

Spiritually speaking, we humans are just like them. We are unable to save ourselves. We are even unable to find our way to the truth. We are easily deceived and very often spiritually confused. We need spiritual guidance.



⁴ D.A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Matthew, Mark, Luke*, vol. 8, Logos, v.36.

⁵ Ibid.

The phrase, *'like sheep without a shepherd,'* has deep OT history.⁶ The phrase refers to a lack of leadership. The first time the phrase is used is by Moses as he considers the time of his death and who will succeed him in leading God's people (Num 27:17). The next time we find it, it is used to describe Israel suffering under the lack of true spiritual leadership by rebellious king Ahab (1 Kg 22:17).

However, the most prominent place we see this metaphor comes in Ezekiel 34, where God commands Ezekiel to prophesy against the priests of Israel, whom God calls the "shepherds of Israel" who were not protecting the sheep, but rather were preying on the sheep.

Ezekiel 34:1-6 (ESV) ¹ The word of the LORD came to me: ² "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? ³ You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. ⁴ The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. ⁵ So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; ⁶ they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.

Because the "shepherds of Israel" were found unworthy to do what shepherds were supposed to do, God promised to remove them and come and rescue his people.

Ezekiel 34:10-16 (ESV) "I am against the shepherds... I will rescue my sheep from their mouths... Behold, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seek out his flock when they are scattered, so will I seek out my sheep... I will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them with good pasture... I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. I will seek the lost, bring back the strayed, bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak."

These are the words of a compassionate shepherd. These are the words of God. Where the human shepherds fail, the divine shepherd will succeed. These words describe what a true spiritual leader ought to do. This is why Jesus called himself "the Good Shepherd" (Jn 10:11, 14).

The word shepherd is the word from which we have our word pastor. These words describe what pastors ought to do. The whole church should take note of these words for they describe

⁶ Numbers 27:17; 1 Kings 22:17; Ezekiel 34:5; Zechariah 10:2-3.

what pastor/elders ought to do. We have 22 men currently taking the Introduction to Biblical Eldership class that I am teaching. You men who aspire to to lead Christ's church as elders/pastors, take note of these words.

Do not these words describe the ministry of Jesus? Do not these words accord with the compassion that we see in the person of Jesus? Is not Jesus THE Good Shepherd?

The Pharisees have just called Jesus a servant of Satan (Mt 9:34). In so doing, they have proven themselves unfit to be the spiritual leaders of Israel. Anyone who would hear the word of God proclaimed through Jesus and see the work of God done through Jesus and conclude that such words and works are performed by the power of Satan, is unfit to be the leader of God's people. There is much work to be done in the God's field and in his kingdom. Therefore, more laborers are required.

Harvest: Movement Required (v.37-38)

Jesus now turns his attention to what is most needful and beneficial for the crowds.

Matthew 9:37-38 (ESV) Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

The crowds are likened to an abundant harvest and the disciples are likened to laborers. There is a plentiful harvest, but there are not plentiful laborers. Jesus looks out upon the crowds and he sees them like a farmer would see an abundant crop of good fruit that needs to be brought into the barn. Jesus is like a grand harvester. A plentiful harvest requires plentiful laborers.

Note that this is not required, but it is preferred. Jesus does not actually *need* laborers. The Son of God could certainly gather in the harvest alone if he so chose. But he has not chosen to do this alone. He prefers partners with him in the field. Jesus is clearly quite capable of completing the harvest all by himself if he willed. Since he "*upholds the universe by the word of his power*,"⁷ he certainly could say the word and the harvest would be completed in a moment. But he does not will to bring in the harvest by himself or merely by his word. He wills to bring in the harvest by means of enlisting co-laborers. Thus, he instructs his disciples to pray for more laborers to be sent into the harvest.

The Lord of the harvest. There is one who is **Lord** of the harvest. There is one who is sovereign over the harvest. The harvest belongs to one who is Lord over it. Notice that is "*his* harvest." This is the one who controls both the harvest itself and those who might be laborers in it. This sovereign Lord of the harvest is the one to whom Jesus instructs his disciples to pray. There is

⁷ Hebrews 1:3.

only one person to whom Jesus ever directed his disciples to pray to or to whom he himself ever prayed and that person is God the Father, the Creator of all things. Thus, the Lord of the harvest is the same as God the Father. God is the Lord of the Harvest.

Pray earnestly. Jesus instructs his disciples to pray earnestly. The word '*earnestly*' means, "to ask for with urgency; to beg or plead."⁸ The prayer being commanded here is not a dispassionate prayer, but rather one imbued with urgency. This prayer is necessary. It is the means by which Jesus understands the Father has chosen to accomplish his will. It carries with it a passion for its fulfillment. Earnest prayer is urgent and sincere. It is going to God the Father in faith and believing that He will accomplish what is herein requested. This kind of prayer is far beyond mere religious routine, but entails spiritual fervor. There is kingdom work to be done and it begins with earnest prayer.

To send out laborers. For what should earnest prayer be given? Answer: that laborers should be sent out into the Lord's harvest. "Laborers" are "those who engages in work; one who toils; a doer." The kingdom of heaven needs laborers. Jesus is looking for doers. There is hard work to be done and people who are willing to work are those for whom Jesus is instructing his disciples to pray. Jesus says, "Pray to the God the Father, who is the Lord of the harvest, to send out workers into his harvest." Pray to God for laborers who are not afraid to work.

Immediately after this verse, Jesus then calls his Twelve disciples and sends them out to do exactly the same things that he'd been doing; teaching, preaching the gospel, and healing. Those whom he calls to pray he also commands to go out and to.

So we might be tempted to think that the laborers whom Jesus is talking about here are vocational ministers, or those who earn their living by full-time gospel ministry. However, Luke tells us that at the same time Jesus also called and sent out the twelve, he also called and sent out seventy-two others as well (10:10). Thus, this prayer extends to anyone whom the Lord of the harvest would move and any who would hear and respond to his call.

Conclusion

The kingdom of heaven has come to earth. Jesus of Nazareth brought it. Jesus is God's chosen Messiah whom God sent into the world to accomplish and fulfill all his will. Jesus did that through teaching the truth, preaching the gospel, and healing this sick.

Do you know the gospel? Have you believed the gospel? Are you rejoicing in the gospel? Do you know that the God who created the earth and everything in it, so loved this cursed world, that he sent his one and only Son, into this world to suffer and die, in order to atone for the sin of all who would trust in him, so that he could then bring us to God and we could enjoy his

⁸ Louw & Nida, *The Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, Logos.

company ? That is the gospel. It is possible for unworthy sinners to sit at table with the sinless Savior and his Holy Father. No matter how unworthy you think you are, through Jesus you can be welcome home with open arms by God your Creator. That is the gospel. Receive it. Believe it. Live in it.

When you look out at the world, the crowds, do you see them as Jesus did? Do you see them as sheep who are lost, *harassed*, and totally *helpless* to save themselves? Or do you see them as doing ok? Everyone is doing his best and the world is basically ok. Is that how you see the crowds?

Or do you look on the crowds and see them as wicked cultural corruptors of our God-fearing nation? Or do you look upon them and feel a compassion well up within you that says, The world is not ok. They are like blind sheep, who are helpless against sin and Satan, and on their way to hell unless they bump into a kingdom-worker? When you look at the crowds of the world, are you moved with compassion or condemnation?

Look again at this broken and cursed world. It is presently condemned. There is a plentiful harvest, but there are not plentiful laborers. Therefore, *pray* to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.

Are you one of his laborers? Have you heard the call of Christ? To take the gospel of the kingdom into harassed and helpless world? If you have the Holy Spirit of Jesus dwelling within you, then wherever you go, you can labor for the gospel of Jesus Christ, crucified, resurrected, and reigning.

- In the name of Jesus, go out and labor for him in the medical field.
- In the name of Jesus, go out and labor for him in academic field.
- In the name of Jesus, go out and labor this week for him in the pharmaceutical field.
- In the name of Jesus, go out and labor for him in your neighborhood.
- In the name of Jesus, go out and labor for him in your school.
- In the name of Jesus, go out and labor for him in the food service field.
- In the name of Jesus, go out this week and labor for him in the financial field.
- In whatever field you find yourself, labor for him, by inward presence of His Holy Spirit.

The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few, therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers. Jesus is still advancing his kingdom. Jesus was a teacher and preacher of the gospel. May we preach and teach in his name. Jesus was a healer. May we heal in his name. Jesus wanted co-laborers. May we labor with him. Pray earnestly for gospel laborers.

Pray for the Lord to raise up at least two new elders for Hope church this ministry year.

Pray earnestly for those listening to my voice who need to surrender their lives to Jesus, embrace this gospel, and receive His Holy Spirit.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is this portion of Matthew (9:35-38) viewed as a transitional paragraph in this gospel?
2. What is Jesus' three-fold ministry as described by Matthew?
3. What is the difference between teaching and preaching?
4. What is the gospel? Can you explain the gospel?
5. Why was Jesus moved with compassion when he saw the crowds? What is the definition of compassion?
6. What are the implications that the crowds were described by Jesus as "harassed and helpless?" In what ways does this description reveal their need? What is their need(s)?
7. What is the connection between the Pharisees claim that Jesus "casts out demons by the [power] of the prince of demons" (9:34) and Jesus claim that earnest prayer is needed for laborers to be sent into the harvest?
8. Who qualifies to be a "laborer" in the harvest? What are the qualifications?
9. What kinds of things might inhibit one from more energetically working for the Lord in his harvest?
10. What does "earnest prayer" look like? How would you define it?