

**"The Lord of the Harvest"  
(Matthew 9:35-38)  
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**(Matthew 9:35-38)**

<sup>35</sup> Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. <sup>36</sup> When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup> Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. <sup>38</sup> Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

**Introduction:**

Our church's vision statement is to lead peoples near and far to become devoted followers of Jesus Christ. Everything that we do serves that vision statement. Week in and week out we gather to sit under God's word, we worship God with our sincerest hearts, we serve one other another using our spiritual gifts, and we do all of that so that we can live out our vision statement. For those of us who are members of our church, be reminded over and over that this is why we exist, and so this is why you exist. And even if you are not a member or not even yet a Christian, I want to tell you to we all exist for God's mission. We were not placed on this planet merely for ourselves. God tells us through his prophet Isaiah (43:7) that he created us for his glory. That is why we exist. We are here at this time and this place, not primarily for ourselves, not to build our own little empires. No, we exist for God and we must know that there is no greater purpose that you and I can discover than this one—that we were created to bring glory to God. How does a person, or a church, for that matter bring glory to God? We bring glory to God by living out the purposes of God in and through our lives. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul says it like this in 1 Cor 10:31—So, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

When we live out the purpose of God in our lives, this is when we find the most joy and satisfaction. It's true. Consider when you're studying something you dislike or you're in a job where you feel like a square peg in a round hole...yeah we take it like medicine, but there's not much joy. But then there comes that moment when the round peg has found its round hole and you discover that this is what you were made to do, and this is where you find the most pleasure and joy. If that is our experience with studies and jobs, how much greater will our satisfaction be when we discover God's purpose for our lives?

This is what missions month is all about. Though we talk about missions all the time, here at City, we sharpen our missions focus during missions month, we zoom in, and see what God has to say in his word about his mission and our role in it. This year, we're going to be focusing on this text and the parallel text in Luke's gospel. I will be giving the introductory message today, next week our missionary partner in Bihar, India, Biju Thomas will speak to us. The following week my friend James Kim from the missions agency Pioneers will speak, and then on the last week, our former missions pastor on the KM side of Young Nak, Pastor John Chung will come, and share about a really exciting ministry to peoples here in our own city.

So, let's look at our text:

9:35 Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. 36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on 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 workers are few. 38 Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

Before we talk about what we just read, let's first look at the context. At the beginning of chapter 9, we see Jesus engaging in ministry among the people in the city of Capernaum. The chapter begins with the dramatic healing of a paralyzed man. But upon healing the man, he also declares that the man's sins are forgiven.

After this we see Jesus inviting Matthew, a wretched and crooked tax collector, to be his disciple. Matthew invites Jesus and his fellow tax-collector buddies to his house for a meal. To share a meal was to indicate that a new relationship had begun with Jesus. The religious leaders think that a holy man shouldn't be eating with such low lives and that's when we hear those famous words of Jesus, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick...for I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

From both of these stories we see a couple things. First, Jesus didn't come merely to be some miracle worker. His goal wasn't to pack stadiums and hold ridiculous healing crusades. When you look at the gospels, Jesus performed miracles to authenticate and validate and prove that he was indeed God's chosen servant, his anointed Messiah. The other reason why he performed these miracles was because he cared for people. His main purpose in coming to the earth, was to die for our sins and by dying offer us forgiveness, salvation and eternal life.

What happens next?

The disciples of John the Baptist come to Jesus and ask him a question about fasting. We practice the spiritual discipline of fasting and the Jewish leaders fast as well, but how come we never see you fasting?

And, Jesus says something astounding. Fasting exists for a purpose. There is a season for fasting. But now is not that season. The bridegroom is here. Have you ever been to a wedding where they didn't serve food and drink? Jesus is saying, that because he is here, in the flesh, the bridegroom of the people of God, that now is not the time for fasting, now is the time for feasting. Yes Christians should fast, but not when Jesus is present.

During that dialogue a synagogue leader rushes in because his daughter had just died and he begs Jesus to come and heal her. And then as they were on their way, a woman who had been bleeding for many years, came up behind Jesus and touched his robe and she was healed. He then arrives at the home of the dead girl and brought her back to life.

Then as Jesus was leaving from there, two blind men followed him and cried out for mercy and he healed them.

After that healing, a man who was demon possessed was brought to Jesus and he drove the demon out of him and he too was healed.

What we have here is story after story, in machine-gun fashion, rapid movement, of healing, delivering, forgiving and saving people from their ailments and their sins.

When we get to today's passage, it acts as a conclusion to all this activity.

9:35 Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.

This summary verse gives us a picture of what the ministry of Jesus entailed. It was teaching, it was preaching and it was healing. It was spiritual and physical. It was a holistic gospel. It's like taking a hammer in one hand and a bible in the other. A stethoscope in one hand the gospel in the other. We know what the healing and humanitarian side of his mission was, but what was his teaching/preaching ministry all about?

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From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."  
(**Matt 4:17 NIV11-GK**)

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. (**Matt 4:23 NIV11-GK**)

After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee. (**Matt 11:1 NIV11-GK**)

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (**Matt 24:14 NIV11-GK**)

Jesus preached repentance which means that he believed and he knew that the fundamental problem with humanity is not that they are sick physical, but that they are sick spiritually. He preached the solution to this great problem. He called it the good news or the gospel or the message of the Kingdom. What is that message? It's the message that tells us God is the only true and rightful king of all things and all of us are rebels to him. We've all gone rogue with our sins. We're traitors, guilty of treason. Now, the Kingdom of God has come, and his King with him. That should be a dreadful thing because we're all rebels. But the good news, the gospel is that Jesus came to bring us all under the loving rule of the great king. And he does it by dying the death for traitors.

Chapter 9 is there to tell us that the problems of humankind are huge. The effects of the fall and sin in humankind as a race and in individual people are universal. Our world is in serious trouble. People and individuals have massive problems.

Now, let's take a time-out and consider what this means to us; just pause with me for a second. Take a look at our world. Take a look at people, the students on your campus, in your workplace, behind the doors of the homes in our neighborhoods. Think of them. Picture their faces. Now consider the billions of people in the Muslim world, the Buddhist world, and the secular world...places like Yemen and Saudi Arabia, Thailand and Cambodia, and secular places like China and Europe. Is there a person on this planet who doesn't need the help of Jesus? Is there a single person who wouldn't benefit from a personal encounter with Jesus Christ? Is there a single soul that doesn't require his forgiveness and his gift of salvation? I think that's what chapter 9 was meant to do. It was meant to make our heads spin...one person after another after another after another who need the healing and saving touch of Jesus Christ. Everyone needs him.

But, at the same time this chapter is there because it was meant to set up the next thing. **Seeing the need and plight of humanity should cause our hearts to break with compassion.**

The next verse says,

<sup>36</sup> When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Jesus saw all these people in such need, physically, but more than that, spiritually, and relationally distant from God. They looked like they were harassed and helpless, lost. They looked as if they couldn't help themselves. They looked like sheep without a shepherd. When we hear that imagery about sheep and a shepherd, we might think of a farm or a nomadic people in Central Asia, but perhaps the what it should point us to is the Old Testament people, the nation of Israel. God's people in the OT were considered as his sheep and God saw himself as their shepherd. Take this passage in Numbers 27:

<sup>15</sup> Moses said to the Lord, <sup>16</sup> “May the Lord, the God who gives breath to all living things, appoint someone over this community <sup>17</sup> to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the Lord’s people will not be like sheep without a shepherd.” **(Num 27:15–17 NIV11-GK)**

Or this one in 1 Kings 22:

Then Micaiah answered, “I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd, and the Lord said, ‘These people have no master. Let each one go home in peace.’” **(1 Kings 22:17 NIV11-GK)**

Or...

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. **(Is 53:6 NIV11-GK)**

Or...

<sup>23</sup> I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. <sup>24</sup> I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the Lord have spoken. **(Ezek 34:23–24 NIV11-GK)**

Or this final one:

<sup>24</sup> “My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. They will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees. **(Ezek 37:24 NIV11-GK)**

David had already been dead many years by the time of this writing. It could only have referred to the Messiah. What Jesus is saying as he looks upon the people is this. Jesus, the good shepherd, the true shepherd is now here.

Seeing the people in this state moved Jesus with one of the deepest emotions in the Greek language, translated as compassion. Comes from the root word for bowels, intestines, the gut. Almost always the subject of this verb to have compassion is none other than Jesus Christ. Here are some other verses.

<sup>14</sup> When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick. **(Matt 14:14)**

Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way.” **(Matt 15:32 NIV11-GK)**

Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him. **(Matt 20:34 NIV11-GK)**

When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, “Don’t cry.” **(Luke 7:13 NIV11-GK)**

And then it’s used in two very well-known parables of Jesus, the Good Samaritan:

But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. **(Luke 10:33 NIV11-GK)**

And the prodigal son.

So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. **(Luke 15:20 NIV11-GK)**

What is compassion? Compassion is a gut wrenching feeling of pity for people in a dire situation or condition that leads to actions to alleviate the situation.

If we are Christians, we too must share the same feelings of compassion when we look upon our sinful and broken world. We mustn't allow our heart to be hardened and indifferent. Friends, Christians of all people know from whence we were saved. We remember our lostness and brokenness; our spiritual poverty. Therefore we must share the same feelings of compassions toward our friends and the world. Remember that this year, our goal is to share to gospel with at least one person and to bring one lost sheep back to God.

If you are not a Christian, I want you to know that this is how Jesus feels toward you. He knows you're hurting. He knows you're trying. He knows you're a sinner. He knows every good and evil thing you've done. He knows all your striving and longing. And he looks upon you with a compassion so deep, so powerful, so freeing and liberating, something only he could give. And his compassion moved him go to the cross and die for you so that you would be with him forever in heaven. Open your hearts and receive it.

Well, let's move on. What action did Jesus' compassion lead him to specifically in this passage? Jesus transitions from a shepherding metaphor to a farming metaphor:

Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. <sup>38</sup> Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

What does that mean that the 'harvest is plentiful'? He's saying that it's ready, that the wheat is ripe, that the sheep, the people are ready to reaped and harvested into the God's kingdom.

Jesus is giving us a statement of fact in these words. When we look at our workplace, our campus, or even to unreached people groups, what do we see? Do we say, "Oh they'll never believe... They'll never be open...They're so resistant...They're even hostile...They'll never listen to me." Are you doubting the words of Jesus? Is it he who saves or is it you? It's him. And as Jesus knows the hearts of all people and as Jesus knows the outworking of all of history, his assessment of the situation is, "It's ready!" People are ready to hear to gospel. People are ready to have their sins forgiven. People are ready to come to Jesus. We must believe these words of Jesus.

But then, he says that the workers are few and he specifically addresses his disciples, but he's also saying it to all of us. He's pointing out that there is a gross disproportion. There are so many people ready to be saved, ready to hear the gospel, but there are not enough workers. The situation is the same today. There are still 6,693 people groups that are considered unreached. These 6,693 people groups total 3.1 billion people. That's 40% of the world's population. This is the state of missions. This is the world for which we must have compassion.

So, Jesus says,  
<sup>38</sup> Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

"Ask the Lord of the Harvest." Which means we the first thing we are to do is pray. Now, what does that phrase mean? It means "Ask the Lord that is harvesting". We are invited to harvest those the Lord is harvesting. He invites us to join him in the ministry of harvesting. Just like he invited us to be fishers of men. That means that every Christian has the responsibility to pray that God would raise up more workers, more missionaries, more missions-minded people to harvest on their campus, and at work, in our families and overseas. Come to EMP every Saturday and join the church as we pray for this.

Now, you might think that's all you need to do. If your gospel of Matthew stopped at the end of chapter 9 you might be right, but when we peek into chapter 10, we see Jesus sending out his disciples to do the mission he had already begun doing. We see him doing it again at the end of Matthew when he tells us to GO and make disciples. He also says at the end of the gospel of John,

As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." (**John 20:21b**)

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And, he reminds us again in the book of Acts that we will be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Friends, as Christians, we are a sent people. This is why we're here. This is why we exist. This is how bring the greatest blessing to people. This is how we give glory to God.

Let's pray.