

Matthew 9:35-38 Sermon

Go over recent events in the news. How do we handle this? Truth? We start to get used to it. Our surprise and concern dry up. We've just heard it too much and, in response, we close it off. "Our compassion seems to dry up as we are called upon to exercise it again and again."

We harden ourselves a little, and find it easier to talk about evil in the abstract 抽象 than to be grieved by it in the concrete, or much less, to do something about it.

What is true in terms of physical conflict and calamity is true in the spiritual realm as well. Everywhere we look there are people who do not know Jesus Christ. The mortality rate in our country is around 8 per 1,000 people. That means that there will be about 800 people dying where I live in the next year. Most of them will not know Christ. You meet them in the supermarket, you see them on the road, you pass them on your walks and you talk to them over your backyard fence.

But we become desensitized 麻木. One man commented that the great need of the world often makes Christians become more proficient 熟练 in their faith, but less compassionate. Genuine ministry becomes professionalism 专业主义, we become great at devotions, but struggle with genuine love and compassion for those who are hurting.

Now Jesus, of course, was fully human, just like us. He would have faced the same struggles – to be overwhelmed by the need of the world in which He served. And on this particular occasion we would understand if He did. He is healing in all their cities, and teaching, and casting out demons and yet despite all His work **He sees the multitudes** – they just keep coming...

But the Saviour does not become calloused 麻木不仁. He doesn't become a professional, "Okay everybody, into lines. Greatest needs in line one, if you've had the condition for over 3 years – line two." He doesn't become less caring to become more efficient. To the contrary He is moved continually with compassion, and that compassion leads Him to teach His disciples about their first task in this great role of being Christ's witnesses in this world – and it is this. **Pray. Pray the LORD of harvest to send out labourers into His harvest.**

Something very beautiful – it is not based on our compassion, which waxes and wanes. It is based on Christ's compassion, yet it means something for us. Because He is compassionate 体恤, we have a task. It doesn't mean we shouldn't be compassionate – we should – but it means the foundation of our task is never how **we feel**, but how Christ feels.

(The compassion of) Christ summons the church to pray for labourers in God's harvest

- 1. The compassion (character) of Christ**
- 2. The reason for the summons**
- 3. The requirement of the summons**

1. The compassion (character) of Christ

One of the blessings we see in going through the Gospels and seeing the work of Christ is noticing how often, as Jesus ministers in this world, that His work is described as being performed out of compassion.

Now compassion is a beautiful word. It speaks of a deep feeling of sympathy 同情心 or concern for someone. Sometimes we see someone in need and we say, "My heart went out to them." That is the idea of compassion. For Christ it is the idea that He is moved by the suffering and struggling of the people of this world, and that empathy 同感心 He has for those who are suffering motivates Him to do something about it.

Christ's compassion, therefore, is never *merely* feeling. It is always a godly feeling that moves Him to act, and His actions are always performed to relieve the suffering or wrong that has caused Him to be concerned with the people He is observing.

And as I mentioned earlier, it's a good practice to go through the gospels and see how frequently Jesus was motivated by compassion.

We read the story of the leper 麻风病人 who came to Jesus and said **If You are willing, You can make me clean.** (Mt. 8). Mark records in His account that when Jesus saw that leper coming to Him, and heard the leper's words, that Jesus was **moved with compassion.** (Mk 1)

You remember also the story of the demon possessed men in the tombs, and how Jesus cast the legion of demons out of them. There too Mark tells us that when one of the men wanted to accompany Jesus and stay with the One who had saved Him Jesus told him that he was, rather, to go to his friends and family and tell them how **God had had compassion upon him.** (Mk 5:19)

That was what it meant for God to have healed those men – God showed them compassion.

And there is a lot more – Jesus is moved with compassion when He heals blind Bartimaeus who cried out, despite the crowds protests, **Jesus Son of David have mercy on me! (Mt. 20)**

It was when He was walking on the road that He saw the widow 寡妇 of Nain following behind the coffin of her only son and Jesus, seeing it, was **moved with compassion** and He touched the coffin, and raised the boy from the dead – Luke 7:15 (?)

One of my favourites is when Jesus has just received news that John the Baptist has been beheaded. It was not a good occasion, by any means, but listen carefully to what happens as Matthew records it in Mt. 14:13 **When Jesus heard it He departed from there by boat to a deserted place by Himself.**

Now you remember how Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus, do you not? And when He did the crowds all said, "**See how He loved him!**" Well here, Jesus will show His tears to none. He goes by Himself to a solitary place 孤僻 by boat.

But what happens? He gets out of the boat only to find **that the multitudes had followed Him on foot from the cities.**

Now what would you do? I know what I would do! I'd walk away. I wouldn't dock the boat. I'd cover my ears with my hands and tell them just to leave me, just for a moment. But what does Jesus do? Can't you just leave Me alone for a minute?? Don't you know the one God chose to prepare the way for Me is dead? My cousin??

But what happens? Matthew tells us **When Jesus went out [of the boat] He saw a great multitude, and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick.** And He did so until evening, and then when it was late and they were tired and the disciples said, "Get rid of the crowd, its time to eat!" Jesus fed them – the entire group. How many was it you ask, waiting for Him on the shore, waiting for Him to teach, waiting for Him to heal, needing to be fed? **5,000** men, not including women and children. Undoubtedly, at least 10,000 people.

And only when they had all been fed, and sent home full, and Jesus sent the disciples home across the sea – only then when no one needed Him did the Saviour **go up on the mountain by Himself to pray.**

So often we want to put our hearts in a neat little box. When it's convenient for us, we will show compassion. When it is convenient for us we can help our fellow man. We become efficient 有效率 but we stop being genuine 不再真实

No such thing was ever seen with Jesus. Not in how He dealt with needy people then, and not in how He deals with needy people now.

And this is the Saviour who died for you, and who loves you. We so often think that our problems are too small to bring to Him. Our sins too much, our concerns and hardships not significant enough. Surely He is too busy, surely He is too mighty but no He is and was and always will be a **compassionate** and faithful High Priest who brings us to God.

Come to Him!

2. The reason for His compassion

Various reasons – what this time? Several factors – verse 36

But when He saw the multitudes He was moved with compassion for them because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. 他看见群众，就怜悯他们，因为他们困苦无依，像没有牧人的羊一样。

Jesus looks upon the crowds of people, and He sees that they are weary – the word may not be the best translation. The word in the Greek means **troubled/harassed/distressed**. It is a weariness that comes more specifically as a result of an affliction 患难 being put upon you. Further they are **scattered** – pushed off in different directions.

I don't know how many of the children in the congregation have read the book, "Sammy and His Shepherd." Parents and children, it is a devotional book by Susan Hunt written for kids and based on Psalm 23.

As the book works its way through the Psalms it speaks of what happens when a sheep has no shepherd to care for it. Sheep aren't the brightest animals, but nor are they the most adept at protecting themselves. They need the shepherd to lead them from one area to another if a big move is needed for food, but they also need the shepherd to use anointing oil 膏油 upon their heads to protect them from the little flies that would disturb them. And if the shepherd doesn't do his job – if you remember from that devotional – the sheep is skinny, and constantly finding itself sick and afflicted.

That is the picture Jesus sees in the people He is looking upon. They are like **sheep without a shepherd**. And when sheep don't have a shepherd, they are distressed and scattered. They are subject to attack from wolves, to attack from bugs, to eating the wrong kinds of plants, and to missing the best pastures.

That's how Jesus sees the people. It is a rather remarkable point of view, isn't it? I wonder if we would be so kind as the Saviour. To be clear Jesus does not excuse the sin of the people, and He doesn't pretend that part of the reason for their sad situation is in the fact that they have rebelled against God. Jesus knows that full well – remember He is the One who said He came to seek and save sinners.

Yet, Jesus sees the state of God's people, at this point in history, as a reflection of the teaching or lack of teaching that the people are receiving. They are not being shepherded faithfully by the people God has put over them to shepherd them and we can understand why this would pull at the heart of Christ, can we not? We can understand that this, particularly, would grieve 伤痛 Him and cause Him to want to do something to help. We understand that because we know He Himself is **the good shepherd** 好牧羊人

So what we have here is a very picturesque scene – a very poetical 诗意 scene. The Good Shepherd stands overlooking an enormous flock of sheep but they have been neglected and abused, their wool is in knots and their eyes are watering, their stomachs are thin, the gnats are incessant and He is moved – because He is the Shepherd.

If you have your Bibles open please turn with me to Ezekiel 34:2-4. This has been a problem in Israel for generations. But what would be the remedy? We see it in verse 21-24.

God will raise up a Shepherd. Who? His servant David! And what did we just read of in Matthew but two blind men following Jesus crying out "**Son of David, have mercy on us!**"

Here He is! Now what does this tell us? It tells us that the compassion of Jesus is tied not only to His sympathy or His empathy for His people – although He does have sympathy for us in our weakness – Hebrews promises that. But His compassion is not tied merely to His sympathy, but to His mission. To His character. To His calling to be the Saviour, the Shepherd, the One who **leads us in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.**

And the leaders of the people they knew a lot about the Bible! But they didn't know about true, saving religion! They knew nothing of humility of heart, and reliance upon Christ, and mercy over sacrifice, and love for God and love for neighbour, and the result was that the flock was destitute and Jesus was moved – but He wasn't just moved here in this instant, but rather this was the reason He came.

He is about to go on to say in verse 37 **The harvest truly is plentiful, but the labourers are few** 庄稼多, 工人少 and more than one commentator points out the understatement that Jesus uses here – **the labourers are few?? The labourers are ONE.**

But there were to be MORE. There were to be more throughout all of history – every stage of Israel's growth God had set over His flock shepherds, watchman. They could not change the hearts of the people, but they **had** to give the message.

You remember Ezekiel's words to the shepherds and watchmen of his day. If you see the enemy coming and you don't blow the trumpet, the blood of the entire nation is on your hands. But if you see the enemy coming and you sound the alarm and they don't listen – then you face no guilt. You gave the warning, and they didn't listen.

Now Jesus is not suggesting that if only they had shepherds they'd all be saved – we see that in the instructions He will give His disciples as He sends them out in chapter 10 to be shepherds – workers in the harvest field.

Not saying that if only they had shepherds everything would be fine, but what strikes Him is the fact that they don't even have a chance!

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It is such a huge harvest field, but there's no one truly telling the way of salvation.

So He is moved to compassion as a compassionate Saviour. But He is moved to compassion specifically here because they have no shepherd – no truth of God's word, no real direction in the way of salvation and they cannot be saved without it, and it is His mission to bring it, but as we see even in this text and the progression to chapter 10 this is a mission Jesus will pass along to the church.

Christ's compassion is to be **our** compassion. His moral outrage 义愤 when there are thousands who do not hear the Gospel – that is to be **our** moral outrage. And on the basis of HIS compassion, and HIS task as a shepherd, we need to obey HIS voice. The church is given a commission. This is step 1. Pray.

3. The requirement of Christ's compassion

Talking to disciples – summoned to Jesus in Matthew 4 with these words, **“Follow Me and I will make you fisher's of men.” (4:19)** Yet the first calling He gives to them in this regard is not to go, but to pray.

You can imagine they were ready for the clarion call. They were ready to have the sign up sheet for missions at the back of the church. **Here I am, send me!** But Jesus says this, **“Pray.”**

Why is prayer important? Not saying this is all we do, but it is the first thing we do. Before we write our checks for the seminaries, before we encourage someone in church to go be a minister, before we ourselves get out to talk to our neighbour about the gospel we, each and every one, are called to pray.

This is not because these other things are not important. It is because these other things will do nothing if we do not first go **to the LORD of the harvest.**

Only God can raise up workers for His harvest field. Amen? Do you remember what happened in the book of Acts? On one particular occasion the disciples were arrested for telling people about Jesus. They were kept in jail overnight and the next day they were brought before the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews, to be questioned. Peter and John were the primary speakers in giving the response – and after they heard their words Acts 4:13 tells us that **when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled, and they realized that they have been with Jesus.** 他们看见彼得和约翰的胆量, 也知道这两个人是没有学问的平民, 就很惊奇; 同时认出他们是跟耶稣一伙的。

Now its not to say that you don't need an education – the disciples were **with Jesus**. We get closer to Jesus through His word so if we're going to get in the pulpit we have got to know that word. I am not for a second saying that preparation is not necessary – but it means nothing if GOD does not send out the workers.

And in this command of Christ the church must recognize and put into practice two incredible things 1 – a powerful expression of mercy and compassion on a lost and broken world who, in the vast majority of the cases, never truly hear the Gospel of Christ and 2 – a complete and open admission that we can do nothing about it if GOD will not send out the workers. Because it is HIS harvest and HIS harvest field.

And here is a task that absolutely everyone in the church should be involved in. Would Jesus respond differently if He saw the people in our cities today? Remember Israel was a religious nation. The people their would have known their Bibles! We live in a completely secularized 世俗化 nation – and world population has undoubtedly skyrocketed since the time.

What of us? Our compassion wanes – the need is so great – but Christ's does not, and the task we are given is based on HIS compassion. His mission. His purpose as the GOOD SHEPHERD.

Do you share the compassion of Christ? DO you understand the need that it is motivated by, and do you pray that it may be filled? 12 of the disciples who would be called to pray would be sent. Not everyone is sent in a formal sense but certainly everyone who is first got upon their knees. And though only 12 were sent now in a formal sense Jesus would say to the entire church that they are **His witnesses – the light of the world.**

Missional 宣教 purpose of the church. Do we still have it? Will it lead us in our decisions and discussions for the future? Will it guide us in our prayers right now?

(The compassion of) Christ summons the church to pray for labourers in God's harvest. May we respond. Amen.