

# The Compassion of Jesus

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**Bible Text:** Matthew 9:35-38  
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We come to an end of a section here in Matthew, an end of a section giving us snapshot details and outlying of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ in Galilee and this is a passage that looks back upon this, kind of gives us a summary statement of that ministry of Jesus' teaching and healing, and gives us in short form a glimpse into this, and also it is a section that looks forward, it looks to what is to come, and in the outworking of things, Pastor Mike will be continuing in Matthew, beginning with 10:1 next Lord's Day, God willing, and continue on through the Gospel of Matthew.

What I want us to see here this morning is the work of our Lord Jesus Christ and to see the people that he encountered in this ministry, to see them as he saw them, to feel as he felt about them, and in that, that we would hear his call to apply to him, to plead with him for those to come and to join in this great harvest; that the people there in Galilee who have seen a great light, that that light would advance; that the knowledge of the Lord would fill that place, that a harvest of souls would be brought in to Christ's kingdom.

Do you see what Jesus saw? Now notice here, he is in verse 35, going "throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the Gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction." It's believed that the population of Galilee, this region here, is anywhere, and the numbers differ from about 200,000-700,000 Jews, but it is also known as Galilee of the nations, Galilee of the Gentiles, so you have a huge Gentile population as well. So if you take that larger number and then lump in the number of Gentiles, the non-Jewish people living in this region here, it is about equivalent to the Oklahoma City metro, about 1.3 million or so people in this area, and Jesus is going throughout their villages, throughout their towns proclaiming, teaching in their synagogues, healing, proclaiming this Gospel of the kingdom. He is there calling on them, "Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand, the kingdom of God is among you," that the King is coming. There is this judgment which is to come because it is not just a visit in a sense like we had this past week where President Obama visited Oklahoma City and then visited the federal prison out in El Reno, and everybody smiles and so forth, and then he gets back on Air Force 1 and goes to wherever he goes and that. When a king would come to make a visit, it was a visit to take names and to kick whatever. It was there to bless those who are doing what is right, but it is also to fix what is wrong when he is to come. So this call of Jesus for the kingdom of God is among you, the King is coming, that there is implied in this visitation, as it's known, this visit of the King, that

the sovereign is going to come and with that is going to be judgments, so there's a sense of urgency involved with this as well.

And so Jesus is going proclaiming this, so what does he see? Well, verse 36, he "saw the crowds, and he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." The word here is that they are just downcast, they are mired down, they can't get up, but also as well as if they were flayed alive, that's kind of the root meaning of that. These are people who just have been skinned. Well, who's been doing this? Well, it's you read the Old Testament prophets and you see Jesus condemning the scribes, the Pharisees, these teachers of the law. They are the culprits who have misled the people. They are the ones who have looked out for their own interests as opposed to the interest of the flock of God's people. They have said there is peace, peace, when there is no peace. They are ones who proclaimed to them a message that is not consistent with the law of God, not consistent with the Gospel, not consistent with the coming of the Lord in any way, shape or form.

So he sees them in this condition because they have not heard the word of God, they have not had this ministered to them, because they are a people who are so weighed down, cast down by this that there is this movement within Jesus, he is moved with compassion. The word literally is in the seat of the emotions would be "here in the gut," here and just that inward moving of his being. This was not just an intellectual type of compassion, this is a movement of all that Jesus is in reaction to seeing them, this compassion because of seeing them in this particular way. And so he sees these people who are dispirited and distressed who have been prey to the false teaching and the false interpretations of the law which Jesus has corrected in the Sermon on the Mount which we have heard, we see that these people, though, have suffered the ill-effects over the years, over the centuries, as it were, and they're harassed, they are distressed, and Jesus is moved to do something about this, and this is what true compassion is, true love is, it is a giving of one's self, it is a moving to seek to do good for the others.

But what is it that Jesus does? He turns to the disciples, as it were, and he said, "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." Jesus tells them to pray. He tells them to pray. These are people who are harassed and distressed, these are people who are downcast and discouraged, these are people here who have suffered so much, and yet Jesus says, "Y'all need to be praying concerning the matter."

Now to our ears today and that reaction, it's something that we, there's a little bit, "Yeah, we'll pray," but there's something lacking in it, isn't there? That there's, we expect the "roll up your sleeves and get after it" kind of action, but Jesus tells them, "No, the beginning place is to pray," and he'll use here the picture of a harvest. This is not something that many of us are accustomed to or have much understanding because we're not in an agricultural culture, but the idea is that you have the day laborers who are out working in the field in the harvest, and the circumstances are such that the harvest is over-abundant, it is just amazing to see, and there aren't enough laborers to bring it in in a timely fashion, that you're gonna lose part of this harvest because of this.

I remember back in my first congregation in Mississippi, there was one year and I think it was the year actually when I was in seminary, not when I was in this small cotton producing area, but there was one year the crop was just, the fields were literally white under harvest. It was just phenomenal. Amazing. And then we had 29 inches of rain in October and it was, you would just cry looking at all of that rotting in the field, not being able to be taken out of the field. But the urgency of this is something that we need to feel in this situation. It's kind of like you're desperate and that's what we need to feel, the desperation and the urgency behind this prayer request on the part of Jesus and this command to them to pray.

I remember and this was back in the day before cellphones and so forth, back in Paris, Texas, my dad worked as a vice president for sales and marketing for a cattle feed company and one night we got a phone call that the feed store that was attached to the grain elevators that we had was on fire. Oh boy, because we had all kinds of issues with those grain elevators and we all had in our minds eye these concrete rockets going up because of the dust in them combusting and just, you know, the south end of town taken out by the explosions. And so we're frantically getting on the phone calling other people, employees and so forth, to come down and we all rushed down to the mill and removed all of the semi-trucks and all of the flatbeds and everything else that we can find, and you know, I hop into the cab of a semi and I don't know how to drive the thing, all I can do is put it in granny gear and I can make maybe a mile and a half an hour pulling that herky-jerky, but I got it out of there. But the desperation and the urgency of the situation was such that this was not something that we, "You know, I'll see. I can get down there in an hour." No, it had to be now and so we were on the horn calling people as quickly as we could. That's the idea behind this, "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest," and this is a pleading with the Lord of the harvest, "Lord, we need more workers! The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few! Lord, send more laborers into the harvest!"

So seeing this great need for the workers for the harvest to go out to minister to these people there in the towns and the villages where he has been ministering, where these people where he has been teaching them and proclaiming the kingdom of God is there, this good news of its coming, this healing of every disease and affliction, these people who are harassed and distressed, who are helpless, like sheep without a shepherd, to call out to the Lord to come in and to bring extra laborers to come and to minister in this place. Do you feel as Jesus felt? Do you see the people around you as Jesus does? Do you see the people in your neighborhood? Do you see the people in the cubicles next to yours? Do you see these people around you because of the false teaching, because of the ways of sin that have been so entrenched? They are coming and they are harassed and helpless people, indeed you look around and they are like sheep without a shepherd.

I remember one night our church back in Lawton, we were replacing a stretch of sidewalk out by the fellowship hall, and we had had some issues previously with pouring of concrete when kids would come and scratch gang signs into the concrete, so we decided to set up a rotation amongst the elders and deacons to kind of ride shotgun on the concrete while it was curing, you know, just so while it's set up enough where you

couldn't go in and scratch in something for the Crips or the Bloods or whoever. And so what we did was we'd sit there and we watched and we sat up until midnight, two in the morning, something on that order. And after that experience, we got together and we were talking about it and the one thing we all mentioned was the neighborhood was awash with children that had no supervision. We were seeing six-year-olds out past midnight running around the streets. All these little kids, they were like, and we all said they were like sheep without a shepherd and so we prayed, "Lord, what would you have us to do?" And one of the things we set up was a ministry to these kids once a week to come in and do some sports and recreation and some Bible study with them and homework help and so forth, but to get to know them and to share the Gospel with them. And it was just heartbreaking what you would hear from these little kids as to what was going on with them, just the abuse and, you know, there were situations where we would have to call DHS and it was heart-rending, but these were kids who were just soaking it up of whatever love that you could give to these little ones.

It was a situation where we saw these children and we heard what was going on with them and that required of us to be in a place where we could hear what's going on. You know, yes, we could have sat at home and watched ESPN, we could have enjoyed going out to the movies, you know. Frankly, I didn't like having to sit there and swat mosquitoes and to sit there, but the Lord had us there for a purpose. It wasn't for the concrete, it was for the kids, and the Lord has sovereignly placed you and me where he has whether it's out at Tinker or it is in Timbuktu. Christ has sovereignly placed you to minister, to look around you and to see the needs, to see these people around us who are like sheep without a shepherd.

And so do you see these people as Jesus does? Or maybe, maybe you've become so turned in upon yourself that you're dealing with your own problems and the problems of your own household, or maybe the problems of, "You know, I just can't get that boat working the way it should or that swimming pool cleaned out the way I would like it." You know, that's nothing against boats or swimming pools but you understand the point that we can become so distracted that we fail to notice the need. We're focused on the concrete curing and not the crying need of these children who need a Savior, who need a shepherd who will love them to the end. Are we so focused in upon ourselves that we fail to notice and have our own hearts moved as well?

Now sometimes charities will receive money, non-profits receive money and then they'll see kind of a downturn and sometimes it occurs in circumstances where the charities will have what they call compassion fatigue because, you know, you can only have so many famines and only so many earthquakes and floods and fires to occur within a space of time and everybody is clamoring for this need and your heart is tugged this way and that way, and there gets to be a point where you just kind of shut down and say, "No more. I can't take anymore of this. I can't give. You know, I've given to there and there and that hurricane and that flood and that fire and these abused children, and that particular need." And that's understandable. You know, with all these inputs we get overwhelmed with these things and it gets to the point where we have a compassion fatigue.

We often, I don't think very many of us reach that point, what Jesus is talking about here with us is just having compassion in the first place, and in that compassion of Jesus, what is it he tells us to do? Pray that the Lord of the harvest would raise up more workers for the harvest. To pray that the Lord would raise up ministers and missionaries and teachers to go out into the ripening fields that all men might be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a compassion that rolls up its sleeves and gets on its knees. Are we moved with compassion towards the people around us? Is our first impulse to click on that button to donate or to go before the King of heaven and plead with him in that particular need?

Also, if we look at this passage here and we're doing what our Lord Jesus commands, that we're praying that the Lord would move hearts for more laborers in this kingdom to see this need that is around us and to see it as Jesus sees it and to be moved with compassion as Jesus is moved as well, that we are praying and pleading with the Lord, and some of us might have a defective compassion. A defective compassion. Maybe we have looked at the world around us and we say, "Okay, they're in this because, you know, they got themselves into this problem." Well yeah, they might have indeed gotten themselves into that problem, what are you gonna do about it? Leave them alone? No. So your view of the problem may be skewed and also your proposed solution may be skewed. Jesus says first that we pray and I think we begin first with the Gospel, we begin first with the work of Jesus Christ in our own hearts, "in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, the just for the unjust, that he who knew no sin became sin for us in order that we might become the righteousness of God in him." And that moves us from a judgmental attitude to one that says, "Yes, I deserve judgment from the living God but he has had mercy, he has had compassion upon me."

And think of how the Lord had compassion on you. It was through the answering of this prayer. "Faith comes by hearing," we're told in Romans, "and hearing comes by the word of God, and how shall we hear except," what? God gives a preacher. God gives the word. You were converted under the ministry of the word in some way, shape or form. How did that come about? By God's sovereign design, yes, but through these prayers of God's people through the ages who have understood this Gospel compassion that's been shown to them in Christ and has moved others to be praying that the Lord of the harvest would raise up other laborers unto the harvest, and this is all in the sovereign design of God, that he brings all this to pass. This doesn't compromise the sovereignty of God, our prayer, again remember we prayed in the Lord's prayer, "Hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth even as it is in heaven," that this prayer of ours is the instrument, part of that chosen means to bring this about, and those people who are to be harvested, to use the illustration that Jesus uses here, already belong to that vast company of Christ, the elect whom his angels will gather at the end, as we will see in Matthew 24. Did not Jesus encourage us to pray in the confidence that our heavenly Father delights in giving good gifts to his children? And what better gift could these workers receive than a harvest of the redeemed. It is often the prayer for ministers that the Lord would give us many souls as our hire. That's not something ghoulish, it's something glorious and gracious, to see the conversion, to see the work of the Gospel, but it is all by God's means and God's appointment for his glory.

This praying in faith is God's appointed means which he has ordained for the fulfilling of his saving purpose in Christ Jesus. Calvin said, "Keep hold of both points then. Our prayers are anticipated by him in his freedom, yet what we ask we gain by prayer." And you heard that word as a result of the prayers of God's people, that the Lord would raise up laborers unto his harvest.

I heard the Gospel and then was converted under the ministry of a man who emigrated with his family from northern Ireland and he was the only one of his family to remain in North America, and he went to a rally in the late 40s that was headed up by a fellow by the name of R. G. LeTourneau, LeTourneau University down in Longview, Texas is named after this fellow. It was a guy who built earth moving equipment and he was quite noted for that, but also who loved Christ, loved his Gospel and spoke at this meeting and Eric was converted out of his family and remained to stay and in the providence of God because my dad hated cold weather and the next place on the corporate ladder from Illinois was Minneapolis, he took a job in Texas, and my dad has a co-worker who is head of a youth group who had said, "No, I will be here for these kids," and in the providence of God I wind up in that youth group and I sat under the Gospel preaching of Eric and then converted.

"Oh, the ways of God are past finding out," but all in answer to this prayer, "Lord of the harvest, raise up laborers unto your harvest. The fields are white, they're ready, they're full." But there is also a sense of urgency to this as well because a harvest is not put on hold, it is something that has an end-date, as it were, and there is coming that day when our Lord Jesus will return in glory and "the trump shall sound and the dead in Christ shall arise and together with those who are left, be caught up in the air and we'll be transformed in the twinkling of an eye." In that great getting-up morning, that great day when we will be there, it will be the day of glorious rejoicing for the saved but also a day of judgment and terror, "Depart from me, you workers of iniquity."

There is an urgency here behind this prayer. Do you not see not only the people around us and moved with compassion for them, do you also hear the urgency of our Lord Jesus in bidding us to pray this way because he is coming again? Do we keep these things before us? This is a call that he would send ourselves, send those who would come. You see, if we align ourselves with this compassion of the Lord Jesus and we buy into his analysis of the situation because it is the analysis of the situation, we'll learn to pray to the Lord of the harvest that he will send forth laborers into his harvest, and this is not something that we casually treat, it has that urgency of the mill's on fire. It's not something we'll get around to, it's something we're out the door. Are we hitting our knees and continually pleading with the Lord? You see, in this we must commit ourselves to regular fervent prayer for the advance of the Gospel, that the Lord Jesus would raise up these laborers, these ministers and elders and deacons and teachers and workers to go into these ripening fields to preach and teach all that Christ has commanded, to pray that God will give them words that will penetrate the heart, words that will deflate man's pride, words that will kill the cancer of sin, words that will bring hope to the despairing and truth to the

ignorant. "Lord, give them words, give them courage to speak them clearly, but Lord, give us these men to do this!"

And I hope that will be your prayer over the coming months, that the Lord would raise up a particular laborer for this part of his vineyard, and be a man who would fearlessly speak God's word to you, that when the circumstances require that he swings for the fences, he not lay down a bunt but he would with boldness and love proclaim the truth of the Gospel to you and pray that you have receptive hearts to receive it. "Lord, give them words. Encourage to speak boldly for you. Lord, give us these men."

Another thing, not all may go, it is said, but all must pray. You know, oftentimes and this, it's not an option, it's not a side bar to the work of the Gospel, the work of the church, it's vital, it's necessary for us as a church, for its people, to pray this prayer, to pray it frequently, to pray it fervently, to commit ourselves to this work of the kingdom. All may not go but all must pray because it is to call, "Pray ye therefore," as the old King James would put it, because you see the need, that the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest. "Lord, bring this to pass." Oh, that you'd be praying for this, that God would bring this about; that you would plead with him so he would do.

But it is also a commitment of yourself in answer of this prayer. "Lord, raise up laborers unto the harvest." Oftentimes our prayer is, "Lord, here I am, send her." Am I right? Yeah. It is the case. You know, when a phone call comes and says, "Hey, we want you to consider going to India to train pastors," and you're working on this sermon, that's gonna mess with you a bit. But each and every one of us, every one of us are created servants and we are at his call and we are at his determination of when and where and how we serve him. But this praying for this advancement of Christ's kingdom, this prayer that he would raise up these laborers unto the harvest, it's also a commitment of ourselves, even the sacrifice of ourselves for the sake of the advancement and answer to prayer. Paul prayed as he did for the saints because their salvation was for him the most important thing in the world. Paul's life was spent. He was willing to spend and be spent for them. He was imprisoned because of his commitment to the proclamation of this Gospel of Christ Jesus. To pray for the salvation of the lost, to pray that the Lord would raise up laborers to go out and to spread this Gospel, to pray for the encouragement of saints, is to pray for the Gospel's progress in the world, and yet it is utter hypocrisy if in our own lives our attitude is, "Lord, here I am, send her."

Your Savior Jesus bids you in his compassion to pray. Because Jesus loves you, because Jesus loves those who have been appointed to be his from before the foundation of the world, he bids you, he bids me to pray with urgency, with fervency, with faith, but also with that commitment of ourselves to serve him. Will you hear and heed him? Will you respond to his grace and mercy shown to you? To his compassion to you? Will you respond as he bids?

Let's pray.

*Lord, we hear this call and it makes us nervous. It is something that is, we see the need around us but, Lord, help us not just to see but to plead with you, to cry out to you because of the urgency of this situation and these circumstances. Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you have loved us so much that you pled, you commanded us to plead with the Father that he would raise up laborers unto the harvest and, Lord, you answered that prayer in our own lives and you will answer it in the prayers of your saints of the ages. It is in your name, Jesus, we thank you. Amen.*

Brothers and sisters, in Philippians 2 we read,

1 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.