

Workers Needed
Matthew 9:35-38

Introduction

Please turn to Matthew 9:35-38. In our study last week, we saw that Jesus had left Capernaum and had returned to His hometown of Nazareth for a visit. He once again taught in the Synagogue there and once again received a response of unbelief. Though the people were astonished at the wisdom of His teaching and the power of His miracles, they would not believe His message. They were blinded by their familiarity with Him. To them, Jesus was still just a carpenter's son whose mother was named Mary and whose brothers and sisters still lived in the town. He had grown up there and worked among them until He was about thirty, so they knew the integrity of His character, yet now they question in unbelief the origin of His abilities.

It was obvious that He was from God, yet they refused to believe. Therefore Jesus only did a few miracles of healing there out of compassion for the sick. He would not perform miracles to entertain or satisfy ungodly curiosity.

Our text this morning explains what Jesus did after He left Capernaum and was rejected at Nazareth. We are going to examine this passage in three sections. Jesus' work, Jesus' compassion and Jesus' Call. As we look at each of these sections, I would like you to think about what they mean to you personally. Jesus had His work - what is your work? Jesus had demonstrated deep compassion - what compassion do you have? Jesus calls us to respond to the need - how are you responding?

“And Jesus was going about all the cities and the villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. And seeing the multitudes, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.’”

Jesus' Work - Matthew 9:35

Matthew 9:35 is almost the same as Matthew 4:23 which marked the beginning of His ministry in the region of Galilee. In the sections between these two verses Matthew has presented the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) and the proof of Jesus' identity by His many miracles showing He has authority over disease and sickness, the natural world, the supernatural world, sin and death (Matthew 8-9). We have studied many of these events in even greater detail and others that occurred during this time period in the parallel passages in Mark and Luke. Jesus' teaching is from God and His abilities can only from God. Jesus is the promised Messiah, the anointed One sent by God to redeem His people.

The only difference between these two verses is that Matthew 4:23 states that Jesus was going about *“in all Galilee,”* and 8:35 says that Jesus was going about *“all the cities and villages.”* The former signifies the general area covered while the latter demonstrates the extensiveness of the work done. The area of Galilee was about 40 miles wide and 70 miles long. Josephus, a Jewish historian living at the time of Christ, records that there were around 200 cities and villages in that region with 15,000 people in the smallest of them (due to the fertility of the region). This means that there were at least 3 million people in the region. Taking note that Jesus went about in *“all Galilee”* and that He went into *“all the cities and villages,”* it is reasonable to assume that a large portion of these 3 million people would have had some direct exposure to Jesus.

That is the extensiveness of Jesus' work done for the people of this land who were described in Matthew 4:16 as "*sitting in darkness.*" Jesus was the light shining in that darkness, and Jesus brought the light of truth and hope to them in three ways - teaching, proclaiming the gospel and healing. Let's explore each of these a little deeper

Teaching in Their Synagogues

Jesus took advantage of the custom of the time for visiting Rabbis to bring the message in the Synagogue. He would call for a certain Old Testament passage to be read and then He would explain the passage showing God's plan for their redemption. An example of this is seen in Luke 4:14f when Jesus returned to Nazareth the first time. He entered the Synagogue on the Sabbath and then at the appropriate time stood to read the prophet Isaiah (61:2). He then sat down to explain what He read and its application for the present time. In this particular case it was the fulfillment that day of Isaiah's prophecy.

This was one aspect of Jesus' ministry that He did throughout the region of Galilee in every city and village. It was the means by which Jesus was able to show the people that He was indeed fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies. Jesus is the Messiah.

Proclaiming the Gospel of Kingdom

Related to the teaching was the proclaiming. The teaching was more centered on explaining the meaning of the Old Testament Scriptures to the people. The proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom was the direct application and announcement to the people that the prophecies were being fulfilled and they needed to repent for the kingdom was at hand. The proclamation was good news (gospel) of God's graciousness and mercy to His people. Messiah was present and among His people.

Healing Every Kind of Disease and Every Kind of Sickness.

The presence of Messiah brought about the fulfillment of Isaiah 35:4-6 & 53:4. Jesus in essence banished sickness and disease from His presence through His ministry of healing. The blind received their sight, the lame walked, lepers were cleansed, the deaf could hear and the dead were raised up. Jesus healed every kind of sickness and every kind of disease as He ministered throughout Galilee.

The response to Jesus' ministry was mixed throughout this period and region. Nearly everyone was amazed at all He did and said, but for the vast majority of people, it made no lasting difference in their lives. Some people, particularly many of the religious leaders, rejected Jesus openly and spoke and worked against Him. Yet, such opposition did not deter Jesus from fulfilling the ministry that God had for Him on earth. He taught in the synagogues, proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom and healed every kind of disease and sickness throughout all of Galilee. There would be no excuse for these people not to know that the Messiah had come, for He was in their midst. There were also some that heard and believed.

Jesus' Compassion - Matthew 9:36

While verse 35 tells us what Jesus did, verse 36 tells us why He did it. "*And seeing the multitudes, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd.*"

The emotion that arose in Jesus as He saw the people. The word translated here "*felt compassion*" is the strongest word available to describe this feeling (*splagcnizomai* / *splagchnidzomai*). The word actually refers to His bowels and is descriptive of the sense you might get when your child has had an accident and you see him or her in the hospital for the first time. That is not a casual feeling "*sorry for them*" or "*this is a sad situation.*" This is a feeling that hits you right in the pit of your stomach. You do not have sympathy, but empathy. You don't feel for them, you feel with them. This

compassion motivates you to do whatever you possibly can to alleviate their suffering. That is the way that Jesus felt for the multitudes. He felt it physically in the pit of His stomach.

Why such a strong feeling? Because the situation the multitudes were in was desperate. Our text describes them as *“distressed and downcast.”* The KJV has *“they fainted, and were scattered abroad.”* The ESV says, *“harassed and helpless.”* The Amplified version puts all of these together and says, *“bewildered - harassed and distressed and dejected and helpless.”*

The first word (skullomai / skullomai) has a root meaning of *“being flayed”* or *“having the skin torn”* as might a sheep wandering among the brambles and sharp rocks. Its derived meaning would be *“harassed”* or *“severely troubled,”* and it would carry the idea of being battered, bruised, mangled, ripped apart, worn out, exhausted.

The second word (rJiptw / ripto) means to *“throw with considerable force - to throw, to hurl.”* In this context it would be to *“throw down prone and helpless”* as would an exhausted sheep or a person who had suffered a mortal wound. This word was used in reference to corpses lying on the ground.

Jesus was not fooled by religious fronts. He sees the heart and He saw the hearts of these people as wounded and torn by the effects of sin. They were inwardly devastated and helpless in their sinful and hopeless condition. They were *like sheep without a shepherd.* They were entrapped in a system led by the scribes and Pharisees that had codified the Mosaic Law that left them wounded and wandering. Those that were supposed to be leading them were not leading them to God for they were instead wolves leading them away from the true and proper worship of God. These sheep had no shepherd and like a sheep without someone to protect and guide they had become battered, bruised, confused and disheartened.

Jesus' compassion on them in their helpless state was great. So great that He Himself was busy in traveling throughout Galilee ministering to them by teaching them the truth of the Scriptures, proclaiming to them the good news of the kingdom of God being at hand for Messiah was present to redeem them from their sins. They only needed to believe in Him. Jesus was also busy mending their afflictions and healing them from every sickness and disease.

But what about you? What do you think? What do you feel when you see people entrapped in sin? What goes on within you when you see a drug addict or a drunkard stumbling down the street? Is it disgust or sorrow? What goes through your mind when you see people suffering from the immorality of our society such as prostitutes, or women who are pregnant out of wedlock, or a homosexual couple kissing in public? Is it revulsion because they are unclean or pity because they are so lost? I don't know what is in your heart or mind, but God does. Let me challenge you to give serious consideration to the example that Jesus has set for us in our response to those enslaved by sin. Jesus was moved with compassion and so should we. Jesus did not see them as the enemy and neither should we. We should see them as sheep without a shepherd.

Jesus' compassion did not end with a feeling. His compassion motivated Him to move onto ministry. Jesus did much while on earth, but He saw the need was great and would need to be met by more than just Himself. Jesus is God, but He is God in Human flesh and that humanity limited Him in how much He could physically accomplish. Jesus' compassion for the multitudes led Him to issue a call in verse 37, 38 for His disciples to see what He was seeing.

Jesus Call - Matthew 9:37-38

“Then He said to His disciples. ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.’”

Jesus wanted His disciples to see the need of the multitudes. They were sheep without a shepherd and they needed to be led and guided. There was a bountiful harvest but there were few workers to bring it in. Jesus wants the disciples to recognize the need for workers.

What harvest is Jesus talking about? There is debate about that. The common view among evangelists and missionaries is that this is a harvest of multitudes of souls. They see the harvest as fields

of wheat ready for men to just go gather it and bring it in. They point to passages such as John 4:35-36 to support this idea. *“Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest. Already he who reaps is receiving wages, and is gathering fruit for life eternal; that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together.”* In the context of this passage it is obvious that souls are the harvest of fruit for life eternal.

In addition, this idea that this is a harvest of souls fits well within the context of Matthew 9:36 which states that Jesus felt compassion because He saw the multitudes as people who were *distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd*. Jesus’ response of compassion was to minister to them by teaching, proclaiming the gospel and healing. I do not think you can get away from the idea that Jesus’ call to His disciples includes the idea that they should see the people in the same way as He did. He wanted them to also have compassion for people in such need.

A more common theme among theologians is that this is judgment since they recognize that more often than not the term harvest in both the Old Testament and the New Testament refers to judgement. For example in Joel 3:13-14 the harvest is more tender for the fire, *“Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, tread, for the wine press is full; The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.”* This is certainly a passage in which the “harvest” is one of judgement upon the wicked. The same is true in Matthew 13:30, 39 in which Jesus explains the parable of the wheat and the tares, *“Allow both of them to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, ‘First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.’”* - verse 39, *“and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. therefore just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age.”*

When you look at the verses in the immediate context at the end of Matthew 9, it is hard to get away from the idea of judgment. Matthew has presented miracle after miracle demonstrating Jesus is the Messiah because He has authority that only belongs to God. In the last miracle presented in verses 32-34, Jesus heals a mute man by casting out a demon. The response is mixed. Most of the people were amazed yet remain indifferent to Jesus’ message. Then there were the Pharisees who rejected Jesus and were antagonistic even claiming Jesus did the miracle by the power of the ruler of demons. These are responses that bring condemnation of judgment.

What then is the answer since scriptural support can be found for both views and both fit the immediate context? I think Jesus wanted the disciples - and us - to see the multitudes and have compassion with both ideas in mind. There is a need for workers to go out into the fields and bring in the harvest of souls that are saved even while the rest will be gathered by the angels for everlasting punishment. I think the harvest will be of fields that are a mixture of wheat & tares as in the parable. The wheat being gathered into the barns represents the souls that are saved and will be taken to heaven. The tares that are gathered and burned up represent the unbelieving who will be gathered and condemned to everlasting punishment in hell.

This dual idea is also seen in Joel 3 which I mentioned earlier as supportive of judgment for continuing farther in that passage to verses 16 & 17 reveals the Lord is the refuge for His people even while He is judging wicked people. I also find this dual view is more realistic to the world in which we live which is essentially the same today as it was then. We live in a world in which we see multitudes of people entrapped in sin and bruised and battered by its effects. They are confused and lost without hope - sheep without shepherds. Compassion should motivate us to warn them and proclaim the gospel and then direct those that respond in faith to Jesus Christ, but Jesus points out that there are few workers to do this.

The need that Jesus saw and wanted His disciples to see was great, and in verse 38 He makes His request to the disciples to respond to this need, *“Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.”*

Now that may surprise you. It would be logical to think that Jesus would have told them to be workers and go out into the harvest, but instead He calls on them to pray asking God to send workers. This is an important point and one we need to understand. Next week we will examine Jesus’ commission in sending His disciples out into the harvest, so we know the ultimate effect of His request here was that they personally did go into action. So why doesn’t Jesus just say that to begin with. “The harvest is great, so get out there and get busy!”

I can think of two reasons. First, any one person can only be individually involved to a limited degree, but Jesus wants each of us to be concerned about more than just what we can be personally involved with. This is direction of what we can do when the needs are far greater than our individual abilities. Even though we are personally limited, Jesus still wants us to be involved by seeking the Lord is sending others to meet those needs. Most of our praying regarding missions is directly along these lines. We pray for countries and people that need to be taught the Word of God and hear the gospel, and as we do, God sends His workers there. We pray for His workers to go into the harvest.

The second reason is more personal. We must remember that the work of the Lord is the Lord’s work and it must be done in His way and in His timing and not our own. No one is fit to do the Lord’s will until they have sought Him first. Isaiah had to be cleansed - his iniquity taken away and his sin forgiven - before he was fit to respond to the Lord in Isaiah 6:8 saying, *“Here I am, send me.”* We should never get involved in a ministry without seeking the will of the Lord out first. You may not yet be ready and He may want someone else.

What work in the harvest are we to do? Jesus makes that clear in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20. We are to make disciples by going out and proclaiming the gospel, baptizing those that respond and teach them to obey whatsoever the Lord has commanded. In proclaiming the gospel we warn people of God’s condemnation for their sinfulness so that they will repent, and then tell them of God’s mercy and grace in the Lord Jesus Christ who payed the price of sin’s condemnation in His voluntary and sacrificial death on calvary so that we can be forgiven, then He rose from the dead on the third day proving His claims and promises are true and that all that believe in Him are adopted into God’s family and granted eternal life. The bondage of sin is broken and heaven is our destiny. Those that place their faith in Christ are baptized in self identification with Him that their old self has died with Him and been buried and their new self has risen with Him in newness of life. The rest of the Christian life is learning to obey the Lord and helping others do the same that we might be like Jesus. All the diversity of spiritual gifts are needed for the whole body to mature properly. Whatever your gift, ministry, and abilities may be, great or small, you are part of the body of Christ and are needed as a worker in God’s fields of harvest.

Conclusions

There is a great harvest out there and workers are desperately needed. There are a thousand and one things to do to be involved in bringing in the Lord’s harvest. There are many various ministries that take place in and around the church - Sunday School, VBS, AWANA and other Children’s ministries, Youth Ministries, Music, Worship services, Bible studies, men’s fellowship, women’s fellowship, discipleship and many support ministries such as keeping our buildings clean and in order.

There are also many ministries that we do beyond the doors of this church. Some of these are organized ministries such as weekly evangelism, outreach events, visitation, follow-up, discipleship, and missions projects such as the team in the Dominican Republic today. A lot more of these are what individuals in the congregation do on their own such as calling on the sick and shut-ins, personal fellowship, counseling, helping and caring for one another, and seeking to influence personal contacts

for the cause of Christ which would include family, friends, neighbors and those you know through work, school and involvement in hobbies and special interests. There are also diverse ministry opportunities available in cooperation with other churches and organizations such as the Crisis Pregnancy Center, Gideons, Jail ministries, community and service organizations, campus ministries.

Then there are all the ministries that are far beyond our personal abilities. Actually, many of the things I have already mentioned will be beyond you personally because both your time is limited so that you cannot be involved in everything and your abilities are limited to be able to be involved in every ministry of this church. There are also those ministries that are beyond the ability of this church to do anything about except pray and try to give practical support as we can because distance, language and culture separate us from most of the world that is in such desperate need of Christ. I just read that a missions group that produces audio Bibles that run off of either solar power or a hand crank has just finished recording its 900th language, but there are over 7,000 spoken languages in the world, so there is still a long way to go. The work to be done is beyond any of us, which is why Jesus told His disciples to *"beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."* We do not have the resources, but the Lord does.

Let me challenge in each of these areas for the opportunities for harvest are vast. First, to be used by the Lord you have to first see the need and have the compassion of Christ for sinners, so get on your knees and pray for the Lord to open your eyes to what is around you and fill you with His compassion for this sinful world. Second, stay on your knees and plead with Him regarding the areas you see. This includes praying on behalf of those already working in those areas and for more workers to labor in those areas. Third, seek out what the Lord wants you to do and then do it even if it may seem insignificant. The Lord desires you to be faithful, and if you are faithful in a little, then He will entrust to you greater work in the future.

Sermon Notes: *Workers Needed*
Matthew 9:35-38

Introduction

Though astonished at His wisdom and His miracles, most people did not _____ Jesus' claims and message

Though often rejected, Jesus continued His ministry to the cities and villages of the region of _____

Jesus' Work - Matthew 9:35

Matthew 9:35 is almost the same as Matthew 4:23 which marks the _____ of Jesus' ministry in Galilee

Jesus went into all _____ cities and villages of Galilee (a total population of at least 3 million)

Jesus _____ in their synagogues - explaining the Scriptures and the fulfillment of prophecy (Luke 4:14f)

Jesus _____ the gospel of the kingdom - the Messiah was present among His people

Jesus _____ every kind of disease and sickness in fulfillment of prophecy

There was a _____ response to Jesus' ministry throughout this period and region

Jesus' Compassion - Matthew 9:36

Compassion is a strong _____ of empathy that is physically felt in the inward parts

The situation of the multitudes was _____ - distressed / harassed / bewildered and downcast / dejected

Jesus was not fooled by religious fronts, He saw they were like _____ without a shepherd

The religious leaders were like _____ leading them away from truth, not shepherds protecting them

Jesus' compassion _____ Him to extensive ministry despite the rejection

Jesus set the example for the _____ we should have for other people

Jesus' Call - Matthew 9:37-38

Jesus wanted His disciples to see the _____ of the multitudes and recognize the _____ for workers

Evangelists and missionaries usually view this as a harvest of _____ such as in John 4:35-36

A harvest of souls fits the _____ of Jesus' compassion toward the multitudes

Theologians commonly view this as a harvest of _____ such as in Joel 3:13-14 and Matthew 13:30,39

Judgment fits the _____ of the Pharisees rejection of Jesus even claiming His power came from Satan

The ideas of _____ harvesting souls and of judgment are in view - as in the parable of the wheat and the tares

Joel 3:13-17 also includes _____ ideas of judgment of the wicked and salvation for the righteous

Compassion should _____ us to warn the confused and lost multitudes and proclaim the gospel

Verse 38 - Jesus tells them to beseech the Lord to _____ workers into the harvest instead of go themselves

Every individual is _____ and Jesus wants us to be concerned about more than what we can personally do

We must do the Lord's work in the Lord's way and that begins by seeking the _____ of the Lord first

The work of the harvest is to make _____ - go evangelize, baptize and teach them to obey the Lord

Conclusions

There is a great harvest out there and workers are desperately needed

Church ministries within our facilities: _____

Church ministries outside our facilities: _____

Personal ministries: _____

Ministries in cooperation with other churches and organizations: _____

Ministries beyond personal and local church abilities: _____

- 1) Pray for the Lord to open your eyes to see the needs and have compassion
- 2) Pray for those areas - for those serving in them already and for more workers for those fields
- 3) Seek out what the Lord want you to do personally, and then faithfully serve Him with all your heart

KIDS KORNER

Parents, you are responsible to apply God's Word to your children's lives. Here is some help.

Young Children - draw a picture about something you hear during the sermon. Explain your picture(s) to your parents at lunch. **Older Children** - Do one or more of the following: 1) Count how many times the words "compassion," "multitudes" and "harvest" are mentioned. 2) Discuss with your parents the importance of having compassion for the lost and how to be involved in God's work

THINK ABOUT IT!

Questions to consider in discussing the sermon with others. What was the response to Jesus' ministry in Capernaum? In Nazareth? Compare Matthew 4:23 and 9:35 for similarities and differences. How large was the area of Galilee? How many cities and villages were in it at that time? How was Jesus able to so easily teach in the Synagogues, and what did He teach in them? What is the gospel of the kingdom? List out the various diseases and sicknesses Jesus is recorded as healing. What does the word "compassion" in Matthew 9:36 mean? How did Jesus view the multitudes? Why would it be correct to describe most of the religious leaders as wolves instead of shepherds? What is your response to those who are obviously entrapped in sin? How did Jesus want the disciples to view the multitudes? How does He want you to view them? In what sense is the harvest spoken about in Matthew one of souls? In what way is it one of judgment? Why does Jesus direct them to pray for the Lord to send workers instead of telling them to go themselves? What work in the harvest are we commissioned to do? What steps should you take in response to Jesus' example and command in Matthew 9:35-38?