

THE SCROLLS

Bridges: Connecting the Gospel with Everyone We Meet | Matthew 9:35-38

Life Lesson

The greatest tragedy of a busy life is that it trains you to see people as obstacles rather than souls. We rush through our days with our heads down and our screens lit, insulated from the messy, agonizing reality of a broken world, yet wondering why our faith often feels so hollow. The defining lesson of Christ's ministry is that true purpose is never found in self-preservation but in radical, gut-wrenching compassion for the harassed and helpless around us. When you finally stop asking God to bless your comfortable routines and instead beg Him to violently thrust you into His harvest, you will discover that the people you once saw as inconvenient interruptions were actually the divine assignments you were created for.

Examine Scripture

Read Matthew 9:35-38

As you read Scripture, slow down and ask these three questions to move from information to transformation:

1. *What does this passage reveal about who God is?*
2. *How is God calling you to grow or change?*
3. *What is God leading you to do or who is He calling you to be in your everyday life?*

Invision: Seeing the Need

It is dangerously easy to grow numb to humanity. We navigate congested highways, walk through crowded spaces, and scroll past endless faces on our screens, often treating people as little more than background noise, or worse, as obstacles in our busy days.

We live in an age of indifference. This indifference breeds ignorance of those around us. As author Tony Reinke observes: "Our smartphones have become the modern-day pacifiers for adults. We use them to soothe our anxieties, distract us from our boredom, and insulate ourselves from the awkwardness of human interaction. We are becoming comfortably numb to the people right in front of us."

Our default setting is self-preservation and distraction. We look at the masses and naturally feel exhaustion, annoyance, or sheer apathy. But what happens when the Creator of the universe looks at those same crowds? What is the true heartbeat of God as He gazes over a frantic, wandering world?

If you want to understand the beating heart of Jesus Christ, you have to camp out in Matthew 9:35-38. This passage serves as the great "hinge" of Matthew's Gospel. Behind it are chapters where Jesus preaches the Sermon on the Mount and performs miraculous healings. Ahead of it, in chapter 10, the Twelve Apostles are commissioned. But right here, in this transitional moment, the curtain is pulled back. We do not just hear what Jesus teaches, nor do we just see what He does. We get a profound glimpse into why He does it and what He expects us to do in response.

"Jesus continued going around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness."

First, before we consider the compassion in Christ's heart, we must look at the blisters on His feet. Jesus lived out what we learned last week from Matthew 28:18-20: "Go, therefore, and make disciples." Remember, when Jesus said, "Go!" He meant, "As you are already going!" As we go to work, school, family reunions, even Walmart, we ought to be fulfilling the Great Commission by sharing

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the Gospel and making disciples. Before He commissioned the Disciples and us to “Go and make disciples,” He had already set the example: “Jesus continued going around to all the towns and villages” (v. 15). Notice the comprehensive, exhausting scope of His ministry. Jesus went to all the towns and villages. He did not just set up a comfortable headquarters in Capernaum and expect the broken masses to commute to Him. He engaged in a relentless, itinerant pursuit of the lost. He sought out the obscure, dusty, forgotten corners of Galilee.

Are we exhausting ourselves in the same relentless pursuit of the lost? Though our feet ought to be “sandaled with readiness for the gospel of peace” (Eph. 6:15), we ought to bear the blisters of obedience to the Great Commission. True mission (evangelism) is not a scheduled activity; it is the ongoing, daily effort to share the Gospel with those we encounter “as we are going.”

Notice the three aspects of Jesus’ ministry: teaching, preaching, and healing. First, the foundation of His ministry was teaching: “didaskō” (διδάσκω). Teaching is the careful, patient instruction of the mind, unpacking the deep truths of God’s Word. Next, Jesus was preaching: “kēryssō” (κηρύσσω), meaning “to proclaim.” This is the loud, public work of a royal herald announcing a decree. Jesus proclaimed that the Kingdom of Heaven had officially arrived. Lastly, Jesus was healing: “therapeuō” (θεραπεύω). This implies serving, curing, and restoring the physical body. It is the root of our English word “therapy.” Jesus did not compartmentalize humanity. He cared for the mind, the soul, and the body. He brought the grace of God to bear on the whole human condition. J.C. Ryle perfectly captured the weight of this verse: “Let us mark the unwearied diligence of our Lord Jesus Christ in doing good . . . He did not wait for sick and ignorant people to come to Him. He sought them out. He went after them like a shepherd searching for lost sheep.”

Verse 35 offers a quiet indictment of modern, consumer-driven Christianity. The way of Jesus is the way of incarnational pursuit. He leaves the comforts of the synagogue, and ultimately the comforts of heaven, to enter directly into the messy spaces of the world. Are we willing to do the same?

“When he saw the crowds, he felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd.”

If you think back to our study of the Gospel of Mark, this verse might seem familiar. Jesus did not just look at the masses and see a demographic; He saw desperate individuals, and it moved Him

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to His core. The Greek word used here for compassion is “splachnizomai” (σπλαγχνίζομαι). This is not a polite, distant pity. In the first century, the Greeks believed the bowels (the splachna) were the seat of human emotion, much as we talk about the heart today. To feel “splachnizomai” is to feel a deep, visceral, gut-wrenching ache.

Jesus looked at the crowds’ brokenness, and it literally churned His stomach with sympathetic agony. As the theologian B.B. Warfield noted in his classic essay on the emotional life of Jesus: “The emotion which we should most naturally attribute to one in his circumstances... is compassion. The world is a ruined world, and he has come to save it. He is walking through the ruins, and his heart is wrung with the misery of it.” When God looks at our frantic, broken, and wandering world, His primary disposition is not a scowl of annoyance but a gut-level compassion.

Why did Jesus show such compassion? He saw the crowds not with eyes of indifference but with eyes of compassion. He saw their true spiritual condition. Matthew uses two highly evocative Greek words to describe the crowds: “eklyō” (ἐκλύω) and “errimmenoi” (ἐρριμμένοι). “Eklyō” translates in the CSB as “distressed,” but its literal root means to be flayed, skinned, or mangled. “Errimmenoi” translates as “dejected,” but it carries the physical sense of being cast down, thrown to the ground, or utterly exhausted. In other words, Jesus does not just see a flock that has wandered off to graze in the wrong pasture. He sees a flock that has been mauled by wolves, ripped apart by the false teaching of the Pharisees, and left bleeding on the ground. They are leaderless, spiritually battered, and entirely unable to save themselves. That is how Jesus sees the lost! As Charles Spurgeon observed: “If you want to know what the heart of God is like, look at the tears of Jesus. We need a compassion which will make us feel for the perishing, even as Christ felt for them.”

“Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few. Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest.’”

What is Jesus going to do about the leaderless, battered, broken masses? Moved by this gut-wrenching compassion, Jesus turns to His disciples. He shifts the metaphor from a devastated flock to a ripe harvest. The tragedy of the world is not that the harvest is not ready; the tragedy is that the crop is rotting in the fields because no one is out gathering it.

What is the solution? Prayer! Jesus says, “Pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest” (v. 28). The Greek

Personal Reflection

1. In what ways have busyness, digital distractions, or the sheer volume of bad news left you "comfortably numb" to the spiritual needs of the people right in front of you?
2. Are you expecting the lost to come to the church building, or are you actively stepping into the messy, uncomfortable spaces within our community?
3. When you encounter people whose lifestyles, politics, or attitudes frustrate you, what is your gut reaction? Do you feel compassion for their spiritual blindness, or do you default to judgment and irritation?
4. Who in your immediate circle of influence (at work, in your family, or in your neighborhood) is currently living like a sheep without a shepherd? What is one specific way you can extend Christ's healing grace to them this week?
5. Jesus commands us to beg the Lord to send out workers into the harvest. Are you truly willing to be the answer to that prayer? Where might God be trying to push you out of your comfort zone right now, and how might you be resisting Him?

Commentaries

*Expositor's Bible Commentary
(Abridged Edition): New Testament*
Edited by Kenneth Barker

NIV Application Commentary:
Matthew by Micheal Wilkins

Matthew by John MacArthur

Mt. Zion's Mission

*Mt. Zion Baptist Church exists to
MAKE, MATURE, and MULTIPLY
disciples of Jesus Christ.*

word behind this command is "deomai" (δεομαι), which is not a casual request. It means to beg, beseech, or ask urgently. We are to plead with the Lord of the harvest for workers. This is not a weak prayer; it is a bold prayer! However, there must be a warning! If you pray this prayer, you may just be the answer to your own prayer! In other words, there is really no difference between praying "Send out workers into his harvest" and "Here I am. Send me" (Is. 6:8). You cannot look to others to do the work you ought to be doing yourself! If we are truly moved by the vastness of the harvest and the lostness of the people, then we will pray for more workers, but we will do so as we go ourselves! In other words, this is not just a command; it is an invitation! It is an invitation to be a part of the harvesting.

The Greek word for "send out" is startling. It is the Greek word "ekballō" (ἐκβάλλω). "Ek" means "out of," and "ballō" means "to throw or cast." This is the same word used earlier in Matthew to describe Jesus casting out demons. Jesus is telling us to pray that God would violently, forcefully, and irresistibly thrust workers into His harvest field. God's call is not a polite, gentle push; it is divine propulsion. He seizes His people and thrusts them out of their comfort zones and into the mission fields of their neighborhoods, workplaces, and the nations. Again, J.C. Ryle perfectly captured this urgency in another of his writings: "There is no greater proof of the spiritual blindness of human nature, than the way in which men and women can look at the unconverted world, and yet feel no concern."

It is time to look up from our screens. We cannot settle for a "comfortably numb" Christianity, retreating into the insulated bubbles of our homes and sanctuaries while a mangled world bleeds out just beyond our doors. A Savior with a broken heart for the lost simply does not produce an indifferent church.

Matthew 9:35-38 forces us to lay our hearts next to the heart of Christ and measure the difference. When you look at the crowds in your city, in your office, or across the table at Thanksgiving, what do you feel? If our primary reaction to the world remains annoyance, fear, or apathy, we have not yet understood the cross. We cannot effectively pray for the Lord to send out workers until our hearts have first been shattered by compassion.

But be warned: the prayer in (v. 38) is a dangerous one. When you truly drop to your knees and beg the Lord of the harvest to violently and forcefully thrust laborers into the fields, you must be prepared for a startling reality. God's favorite answer to that prayer is the one praying it.