

## A BETTER WAY: Week 1

### Engaging a Culture of Distress with Compassion

#### Matthew 9:35-38

#### 1. Introduction

- a. Welcome - Survey - Fall Kickoff
- b. Series setup - A Better Way
  - i. Today: Jesus' example of engaging culture
  - ii. Next five weeks: Jesus' instructions for engaging culture
  - iii. What is culture? The sum total of ways of living built up by a group of human beings and transmitted from one generation to another.
- c. Cultural concerns today
  - i. Health - mental, emotional, physical, relational, spiritual - esp. teens
  - ii. National & Global concerns - economy, government, war, hunger
  - iii. Civility - attitude toward people with whom you disagree - home, school, work, neighborhood, church, news
  - iv. Macro Trends - information technology, biotechnology, artificial intelligence, post-Christendom
  - v. Gender & Sexuality - personal identity, gender fluidity, trans athletes
  - vi. Race - tension, reconciliation, diversity
  - vii. Family - marriage, divorce, singleness
- d. Stories of distress
  - i. Early 20s woman experiencing depression pulled into social media vortex
  - ii. 53 people died this summer in an overheated tractor-trailer attempting to migrate to the US
- e. What do we do in a culture like this with stories like this?
  - i. Not easy to answer, but we get some grounding in Jesus.

#### 2. Stories of distress in Jesus' day

- a. Matthew 8-9
  - i. A man with a skin disease
  - ii. Two people who couldn't walk
  - iii. A bed-ridden parent
  - iv. Lots of mentally ill people, some violent, one mute
  - v. People afraid for their safety

- vi. People who were labeled and canceled
- vii. A dying child
- viii. A chronically ill woman
- ix. Two men who were blind

b. Jesus' way of engaging culture - Matthew 9:35-38.

**i. Jesus continually went to people in distress and engaged them (35).**

- 1. Teaching them. Giving them hope. Healing them.

**ii. Jesus felt compassion for people in distress (36).**

- 1. Original language = deep-seated emotion
- 2. They were like sheep with no shepherd
  - a. Lit. torn & thrown down like sheep attacked by a predator
  - b. Downcast
- 3. Sometimes we don't feel compassion for people who are downcast.
  - a. My house.
    - i. "I feel bad." "You should feel bad."
    - ii. "I feel sick." "I'm glad you feel sick. Maybe you won't eat all the ice cream next time."
    - iii. "I feel tired." "Of course you're tired. You were up til 3 a.m. watching cat videos on YouTube."
  - b. Mental health.
    - i. People whose brain sends them distress signals at all the wrong times. "I'm freaking out." "Just stop. You're fine."
  - c. Immigration.
    - i. People fleeing for their lives & hiding from ICE. "I feel afraid." "They should feel afraid."
  - d. Abortion.
    - i. A 16-year-old girl who's basically on her own gets pregnant. "I can't take care of a baby." "She should have thought of that before."

**iii. Jesus saw abundant opportunities to bring people into his kingdom (37).**

1. In a culture filled with people in distress, Jesus saw an abundant harvest. People ready to receive compassion.
2. Unfortunately, he also saw only a few workers. If I'm reading the text correctly, only a few are willing to give compassion to people in distress.
3. Perhaps this is because, where Jesus sees an abundant harvest, we see a battlefield. We see political and cultural enemies, and we either retreat to the safety of like minded friends or fight to gain the upper hand. Neither of which is the right response.
  - a. Matthew 5:44. Jesus said, "love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you."
  - b. That means loving people who think and act differently than you do -- politically, socially, culturally, generationally, etc.
  - c. It means loving people who don't love you.
    - i. In Matthew 5 Jesus went on to say, "if you love those who love you, what reward will you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what are you doing out of the ordinary?"
4. 2 widening gaps in ideology: politics & generations
  - a. A good question to ask is "what is distressing to people on the other side of the gap from me?"
  - b. We might need to listen to some of them to find out, and then perhaps our compassion will grow and suddenly we'll find ourselves out there working the harvest -- engaging culture like Jesus.
  - c. What if it's possible that you may not win someone over to your way of thinking, but through your compassion they meet Jesus, and he wins both of you to his way of thinking?

**iv. Jesus wanted more compassionate workers to be sent out (38).**

1. He wants people who respond to the culture of their day with compassion for people in distress.
    - a. Not caught up in fighting for control of culture.
    - b. Not criticizing well-meaning people of different beliefs.
    - c. Not always complaining about the ills of the culture.
  2. He wants people who, like himself, are willing to go to people in distress and engage them where they are.
    - a. Share wisdom. Give hope. Bring healing.
    - b. This is a better way.
3. What did compassion look like in Jesus' day (Matthew 8-9)?
- a. Healing
  - b. Deliverance
  - c. Affirmation of faith & inclusion in community
  - d. Sharing meals with outcasts
  - e. Forgiveness
  - f. Calming of a storm
4. What does compassion look like today?
- a. Healing & deliverance in some cases.
  - b. Can't calm an actual storm, but diffusing some stormy situations wouldn't hurt.
  - c. For most of us:
    - i. Affirmation of faith & inclusion in community
      1. Matthew 8:5-13. The centurion's faith affirmed.
      2. Any measure of faith; welcome inclusion
    - ii. Dinner guests.
      1. Matthew 9:10-13. Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners.
    - iii. Forgiveness.
      1. Matthew 9:2-3. Jesus forgave the sins of the paralytic.
5. Some of us struggle to extend compassion to others because we refuse to accept compassion extended to us.
- a. Maybe you feel you don't need it.
    - i. You're strong. Self-sufficient, or just right.
  - b. Maybe you feel you don't deserve it.
    - i. You've messed up too bad, too many times.
  - c. Maybe you're trying to earn it.

- i. You don't want charity.
- d. The truth is we all need compassion. None of us deserves it. None of us can earn it.
  - i. Jesus looks at us today like he did the crowds in Israel. He sees people who need to receive his compassion and give it freely to others.
  - ii. If you're resisting either today, I urge you to rethink your thinking. To repent and receive the gift of compassion.

6. David French on Queen Elizabeth.

- a. Britain's constitutional monarchy separates the functions of the head of state and the head of government. The head of state is doing her job when she's explicitly not political, when she instead conducts the formal affairs of the state and embodies (as well as any human can) certain core national values.

But there is also immense meaning when a monarch lives the values their role demands. Queen Elizabeth lived with honor and did her duty, and in so doing she helped bind together a fractious people. She helped give them a sense of shared identity.

Again, we Americans can't quite grasp this connection; to us the British royal family functions mainly as a different form of celebrity. But we can and should grasp something else—nations and cultures need people and institutions who transcend politics.

- b. American culture doesn't have a queen, but we do have a church. A church that exists to embody the values of God's Kingdom, of God's Son, Jesus. Our calling is to model a better way. To engage culture like Jesus.