

Rescue Requires Compassion

Text: Matthew 9:35–38 (NIV)

Introduction

Imagine someone standing on the shore watching a person struggle in deep water. The drowning person is calling for help. The observer notices the danger but does nothing. We would never call that person compassionate. The difference between a bystander and a lifesaver is not simply ability—it is compassion that compels action.

The greatest rescues in history have all begun with someone who refused to ignore another person's pain. Spiritually, people all around us are drowning in sin, hopelessness, addiction, loneliness, anxiety, broken families, and eternal separation from God. Many hide their pain behind smiles and success. They may look fine on the outside while quietly perishing on the inside. The Church has not been called merely to observe the lost—we have been called to rescue them with the hope of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 9 gives us a glimpse into the heart of Jesus. Before He commissioned the disciples in Matthew 10, He first showed them why the mission mattered.

Read Matthew 9:35–38 (NIV)

"Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'"

Notice the progression.

Jesus...

- Saw.
- Felt.
- Spoke.
- Sent.

That is the pattern every disciple must follow.

I. Lifesavers See People the Way Jesus Sees Them

"When He saw the crowds..."

Jesus didn't merely see a crowd.

He saw individuals.

Every face represented a story.

Every story represented a soul.

Most people looked at crowds and saw inconvenience.

Jesus looked at crowds and saw opportunity.

Jesus Saw Beyond Appearances

Others saw:

- Tax collectors
- Sinners
- Outcasts
- Romans
- Beggars

Jesus saw:

- Sons and daughters waiting to be redeemed
- People created in God's image
- Eternal souls

We naturally judge by appearance.

God always looks deeper.

1 Samuel 16:7 (NIV)

"People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

Jesus Saw Their True Condition

Matthew describes them as:

"Harassed and helpless..."

The Greek word translated **harassed** carries the idea of people who have been battered, torn apart, exhausted, and oppressed.

The word **helpless** literally paints the picture of someone thrown down or abandoned.

Jesus wasn't simply observing physical poverty. He saw spiritual exhaustion. People were crushed beneath guilt.

Religion without grace. Sin without hope. Life without purpose.

Sound familiar?

Many people today fit this description. They have money but no peace. Friends but no purpose. Entertainment but no joy. Religion but no relationship.

Application

Ask yourself:

Do I see people as interruptions... / or opportunities?

Do I see difficult people...or hurting people?

The people who frustrate us often need Jesus the most.

II. Lifesavers Are Moved by Compassion

"He had compassion on them..."

This is one of the most beautiful statements in Scripture.

Jesus didn't simply pity people.

He was deeply moved.

What Does Compassion Mean?

The Greek word translated **compassion** is *splagchnizomai*. (splahnghkh-NEED-zoh-my)

It literally refers to the deepest part of a person's being.

It means to be emotionally stirred from within.

This isn't shallow sympathy.

It is love that refuses to remain passive.

Compassion always moves toward pain.

Compassion Is More Than Feeling Sorry

Sympathy says,

"I feel bad for you."

Compassion says,

"I'm coming to help."

Jesus never walked past hurting people.

He stopped. He touched. He healed. He forgave. He restored. He embraced. He loved.

Throughout the Gospels

Compassion moved Jesus to:

Feed the hungry.
Heal the blind.
Cleanse lepers.
Raise the dead.
Forgive sinners.
Restore families.
Comfort mourners.

Ultimately...

Compassion took Him to the Cross.
The Cross is compassion made visible.

Entire sanctification enlarges the heart. Holiness is not emotional coldness. Holiness is perfect love filling the believer. A sanctified heart becomes increasingly sensitive to the suffering of others because it increasingly reflects the heart of Christ. The more Christ rules our hearts, the more difficult it becomes to ignore people who are hurting. Holiness without compassion is counterfeit holiness.

III. Lifesavers Understand the Urgency of the Harvest

Jesus shifts from sheep...
to harvest.
Why?
Because harvest has urgency.
Harvest cannot wait.

Harvest Has a Limited Window

Farmers understand timing.
Wait too long...
The crop spoils.
Likewise...
Opportunities disappear.
People move.
Hearts harden.
Lives end.
None of us knows how long someone has to hear the gospel.

The Harvest Is Ready

Notice Jesus doesn't say,
"The harvest will someday become plentiful."
He says,
"The harvest is plentiful."
People are searching.
People are questioning.
People are desperate.
Many are more open to Christ than we imagine.

The Problem Is Not the Harvest

Jesus never criticized the harvest.
He criticized the shortage of workers.
"The workers are few."
Not because God lacks power...
But because many believers have become spectators instead of participants.
The Church was never called to simply gather.
We are called to go.

IV. Lifesavers Pray Before They Go

Jesus gives an unexpected command.
He doesn't first say,
"Go."
He says,
"Ask the Lord of the harvest..."
Prayer comes before mission.

Why Prayer?

Prayer aligns our hearts with God's heart.
Often the first-person God changes through prayer...
is us.

As we pray for lost people...
God increases our burden.
He opens doors.
He gives courage.
He prepares hearts.
Prayer is never a substitute for evangelism...
But evangelism without prayer lacks God's power.

Notice Something Interesting

Jesus tells the disciples to pray for workers...

Then in Matthew 10...

He sends the very disciples who were praying.

Sometimes the answer to our prayers... is the person praying.

Perhaps you've been asking God to send someone to your workplace...

your neighborhood... your family... What if God is saying, "I already have."

V. Lifesavers Follow the Example of Jesus

Matthew 9:35 summarizes the ministry of Christ.

Jesus:

Went

He didn't wait for people to come.

He entered their world.

Taught

People needed truth.

Preached

People needed the gospel.

Healed

People needed compassion.

This is still the mission of the Church.

We proclaim truth.

We demonstrate love.

We invite people into the Kingdom.

Practical Ways to Be a Lifesaver

This week:

Pray for three people who don't know Christ.

- Learn someone's story before trying to fix them.
- Invite someone to church.
- Share your testimony.
- Meet a practical need.
- Encourage someone who feels forgotten.
- Show compassion before offering correction.

People are more willing to hear about God's love when they have experienced it through God's people.

Conclusion

Jesus looked at a crowd and saw a harvest.

What do we see?

Do we see:

Politics... or people?

Problems... or possibilities?

Crowds... or souls?

Compassion changes everything.

When compassion fills the Church...

Evangelism becomes natural.

Serving becomes joyful.

Giving becomes generous.

Prayer becomes passionate.

The mission becomes personal.

Closing Challenge

This week, pray each morning:

"Lord, let me see one person today the way You see them. Fill my heart with Your compassion, open a door for me to show Your love, and give me the courage to point them to Jesus."