



MATTHEW

THE KINGDOM COME

Kingdom Heartbeat
Matthew 9:35-38

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I. Introduction

Let's pray.

Father, I always have a sense of my own weakness as I come to preach your word. Thank you that, though I am weak, you are strong. Mighty God, we depend on you. We are at your mercy this morning. Only you can cause the seeds of your words to take root and bear fruit. Please speak loudly to your people through this message that you may be glorified and that our joy in you might increase. Amen.

Welcome

Good morning! If you don't have your bibles open already, you can go ahead and grab them and turn to Matthew 9.

My name is Ethan. I'm one of the pastors here at Union. If we haven't met yet, I'd love to meet you today! I'm grateful you're here.

Hey, before we dive into the book of Matthew today, let me just take a second and recommend another book. This is a book called, "Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers" by Dane Ortlund. This has been an incredibly resonant, important book for Pastor Kyle and I and I'm telling you about it right now for two reasons: First, I want to give credit where credit is due and let you know that my sermon today has been incredibly influenced by parts of this book. And second, I have a couple boxes full of this book with me here today and if, after today's sermon, you feel like this is a message you want to marinate in and you honestly think you would read it, I would love for you to take a copy! Alright? Ok.

A theologian named A.W. Tozer said, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." Which is a pretty striking statement! Maybe even an offensive statement for you? He's asserting that the most important thing about you isn't your accomplishments or your performance or your behavior. It's not your family or any other relationships. It's not the legacy you are leaving in the world. It's not your interests or hobbies or projects or passions or goals or calling. It's not your level of knowledge. It's not your sexual orientation gender identity. It's not your ethnic heritage. In fact, Tozer is saying the most important thing about you isn't connected to any of

metrics by which our culture typically rates the success or failure of our lives. Tozer says the most important thing about you is what comes to your mind when you think about God. And I agree with him! I want you to chew on that statement today. And for the purposes of digging into the text here in Matthew 9, I want to narrow Tozer's statement ever so slightly and say: What comes to mind when you think about Jesus Christ is the most important thing about you.

And let me just lay my cards on the table: What comes to mind when you think about Jesus Christ is the most important thing about you because Jesus Christ is "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together." (Col 1:15-17). He is "the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." (Rev 22:13). He came so that you may have life and life abundant (Jn 10:10). He is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through him. (John 14:6). One day, "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Phil 2:10-11).

What comes to mind when you think about Jesus Christ is the most important thing about you because Jesus Christ is the reason you exist. And he is holding together the fibers of your existence even now. Your days continue on at his command. And on him rests your eternal destiny. So what you believe about Jesus matters infinitely more than anything else about you. But, you know, there are two sides to what you think about someone, right? Like, when you think of me, Ethan Ezikian, two categories of knowing come to mind. There are the facts about who I am: Male, tall, brown, big-boned, pastor, husband to Dana, father to Ellis, Abel, and Ezri, plays guitar, lives in Livingston County Michigan, etc, etc, etc... All this information about me is part of what makes up the "Ethan Ezikian" file in your brain. But there is also what you think about me, right? Do you think I'm kind or mean spirited? Arrogant or humble? Hard working or lazy? Honest or deceitful? Trustworthy or irresponsible? Creepy or wholesome? And no matter what sort of pedigree, or positions, or performance I have in the "information" side of your "Ethan Ezikian" file, the quality of our relationship depends on that other side? What you think of me. You know this to be true if you've ever had a bad boss, right? Doesn't matter what sort of position they have, if they're an incompetent, rude fool then everything changes about how you function in your job!

So the doctrine we believe about Jesus is incredibly important. Eternal God who became a man, conceived by the virgin mary, lived a perfect life, suffered, was crucified, raised on the third day, ascended to heaven, sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty, is coming again to judge the living and the dead and make all things new. All this doctrine is incredibly important. What you believe about Jesus has eternal consequences. And... And what you think about the character of Jesus, the kind of person he is, is incredibly important. If you check all the right doctrinal boxes about the Lord, but see him as angry, severe, distant, grumpy, or detached then the quality of your relationship with Jesus will suffer! You might believe all the right doctrines about Jesus, but never truly have a relationship with. Friends, God doesn't simply want you to believe the right things about him. He wants you to know him. He wants you to know and trust his heart.

And all of that brings us to the text today. Because here in Matthew 9, Jesus gives us a lens by which to see the world, he gives us a mission as his people, but all of that is birthed out of the character of Jesus. I want you to see the kind of God Jesus is this morning. This passage shows us that the God of the bible isn't distant and disdainful, but compassionate. And it's only in knowing the compassion of God that we can step with the right foot forward in the task he has given us. **The compassionate heart of Jesus for the fallen world has been handed down to us as his representatives in the world.**

II. The Compassion of Jesus

So look at your bibles with me. Matthew 9:35, **"³⁵And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction."**

This is a way of summarizing the ministry of Jesus - the things we've been studying over the last few weeks. Jesus teaching in the sermon on the mount, Jesus proclaiming the coming Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus revealing the kingdom through healing many, many people... It's also Matthew's way of marking a new leg of the journey. Matthew 9:35 is almost exactly the same words as Matthew 4:23, right before Matthew begins this new section of Jesus teaching the sermon on the mount. And here in Matthew 9, we're going to see that this is another turning of the page in the ministry of Jesus. (more on that later). So let's keep moving and look at the next verse: **"³⁶When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."**

Friends, the heart of Jesus is compassionate toward sinners and sufferers. And I'm not pulling this out of a verse in the Bible that says, "One thing you must know about God: he is compassionate" and then moves on to the next fact about God. This is the consistent witness of scripture. Jesus is continually revealing his compassionate character. Dane Ortlund said it so simply, **"His life proves his heart"**¹

- [Last week] In Matthew 8:2 when Jesus heals a leper. The leper says, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." And Jesus immediately stretches out his hand and says, "I will; be clean." The Greek word there for "will" means "wish" or "desire." **"The leper was asking about Jesus deepest desire. And Jesus revealed his deepest desire by healing him."**²
- [Last Week] When some people bring a paralytic man to Jesus, he doesn't even wait for them to ask for healing. The text says "*when he saw their faith*, he said to the paralytic, 'take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.' It's as if Jesus couldn't hold himself back. His words of healing just rise up out of him.
- Healing the sick (Mt 14:14), feeding the hungry (Mt 15:32), teaching the crowds (Mk 6:34), wiping away the tears of the bereaved (Luke 7:13)... in every case the scriptures say, "he was moved with compassion toward them.
- We see two places in the New Testament where Jesus wept. He wept over Lazarus and over Jerusalem. In both cases showing deep sorrow for the plight of others...

¹ *Gentle and Lowly*, Dane Ortlund, 25

² Ortlund, 25

Again and again Jesus upsets the social expectations of his day because he is not repelled by the morally disgusting, or the ceremonially unclean, or the social outcast, or the people with a reputation, or the guilty, or the failing. It's not just that Jesus gives these people healing or mercy or forgiveness, its as if these are the people he most naturally gravitates to! This is why the opponents of Jesus give him a name to try and smear his reputation: "friend of sinners." (Luke 7:34).³ "The cumulative testimony of the four gospels is that when Jesus Christ sees the fallenness of the world all about him, his deepest impulse, his most natural instinct, is to move toward sin and suffering, not away from it."⁴

And friends, remember this, when Jesus reveals his heart he is showing us the heart of the God of all of scripture. There is no separation, no distinction between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament. Colossians 1 tells us that Jesus is "the image of the invisible God" (1:15), Hebrews 1 says Jesus is "the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature" (1:3). Whatever Jesus reveals about himself is true about God and God does not change. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. So the compassionate heart of Christ that we see here in the gospels is a part of the character of God from Genesis 1 on into today.

And, now look at me, that means that God, who is compassionate throughout the pages of scripture, is compassionate toward you. Some of you are burdened by a performance complex. The thing that comes to mind when you think about Jesus Christ is shame over what you've done. Or maybe you have put so many bandaids over your shame that you yourself can't see it anymore, but you're driven by an urge to stay active and prove yourself. Listen to me! The heart of Jesus is drawn toward you in your weakness, in your falling short, in your falling apart, in your failure, in your un-impressiveness! He's not looking at your life and weighing the good against the bad on a set of scales. He's not asking you to make restitution for your wickedness. He's already paid for it! He doesn't even love you because he can see some future, better version of you. He does desire holiness from you, he does have a mission for you, but those are patterns of living that have to be born out of the security of knowing that there is nothing that can separate you from the love of Christ, even your own failure and foolishness. Some of you need to rest in this truth: Jesus already loves you, so stop belittling his love by trying to earn his love. That's not what he requires of you. Some of you need to rest in this truth: "The same Jesus Christ who wept at the tomb of Lazarus weeps with us in our lonely despair The same one who reached out and touched lepers puts his arm around us today when we feel misunderstood and sidelined. The Jesus who reached out and cleansed messy sinners reaches into our souls and answers our half-hearted plea for mercy with the mighty, invincible cleansing of one who cannot bear to do otherwise."⁵

Friends, all you helpless and harassed, the compassionate heart of Jesus is reaching toward you. Would you rest in his loving arms? And if you belong to Jesus, if you follow him as your Savior and King, the compassion of Christ has been set on you and handed down to you so that you might exercise his compassion toward this fallen world.

³ Ortlund, 27

⁴ Ortlund, 30

⁵ Ortlund, 32

III. The Ministry of Jesus Given to His Disciples

Let's reread the rest of our passage... ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸ therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." (9:36-38)

Now, I'm going to keep reading into chapter 10...

"And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction." (10:1)

Hey! That sounds a lot like how Matthew described the ministry of Jesus just a couple of verses ago in verse 35, right? Now skip down to 10:5...

⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, ⁶ but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷ And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" (10:5-7)

So, let me just summarize the scene we've been shown. Jesus is going around teaching, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing. That's his ministry. That's what he alone has been doing. The crowds gather around Jesus and he looks over the crowd and he is moved with compassion deep down in his guts because these people are harassed and helpless, he sees them as if they are sheep without a shepherd. What are sheep without a shepherd? Lost sheep! Then he brings in his disciples and says to them, "the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few" because who has been the one doing the ministry of teaching, proclaiming the good news, and healing up until this point?! Only Jesus. So then Jesus says, pray earnestly to the Lord of the Harvest to send out laborers. And then he immediately gives his disciples authority to do the same kind of ministry that he had been doing - healing the sick, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom! The Lord of the harvest is sending out laborers into the harvest! And who does Jesus send them to? The *lost sheep* of Israel. The ones who he saw were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Remember a little bit ago when I said that Matthew 9:35 is almost exactly the same words as Matthew 4:23 because Matthew wants to mark a new leg in the journey? Well this is it. This is the page turning. Jesus is handing down his ministry to his disciples. And friends, what I want you to see here is that in the same way that the compassionate heart of Christ for the harassed and helpless is the same compassionate heart of Christ for you today; so also as Jesus handed down his compassion-driven ministry to his disciples, we have been given the compassion-driven ministry of Jesus. As Jesus called his disciples as harvesters into the harvest field, we also have been called by the Lord into the harvest field!

Here in Matthew 9 & 10 (pre-cross, pre-resurrection. In other words, before the saving work of Jesus became fully clear) Jesus sends his disciples out with authority to the nation of Israel who were taught by the scriptures to look for the messiah. Then later on, at the end of the Gospel of Matthew (post-cross, post-resurrection. After the message of the gospel has become clear) Jesus again sends his disciples out with authority to make disciples *of all nations*. And it is because "God so loved the world," (Jn 3:16)! It's because of the compassion of God toward the sinful and suffering world that he came and then commissioned his disciples with his ministry. And through the compassion-driven

ministry of Jesus's, proclaiming to the harassed and helpless sheep of the world that there is a good shepherd, that the gospel began to spread. It's because Jesus handed down his ministry to his disciples that the gospel spread from a tiny nation in the middle east, across europe, thousands of miles, across centuries to north america. Listen, it's the compassion of Jesus that drives us to preach the gospel and plant churches so that more and more people might become disciples of Christ. It's because of the compassion of Jesus, exercised through his disciples that the gospel came to you. And It's because of the compassion of Jesus, exercised through his disciples that our church has been planted. And finally, is because of the compassion of Jesus, handed down to us that we are driven to be a church that goes toward the sinful, suffering world with the good news of Jesus Christ.

IV. The Compassion-Driven Ministry of Jesus In Us

And so followers of Jesus, since the compassionate heart of Jesus for the world has been handed down to us, can I call you to fulfill your destiny as disciples of Jesus?

The harvest is plentiful in the world today.

- Unreached People Groups Across the World
 - “Members of a people group share a common history, language, cultural identity, and worldview. It's the largest ethnic grouping of people within which the Gospel can flow without barriers to understanding. A people group is unreached if it has no indigenous community of believing Christians with adequate numbers and resources to engage its people with the Gospel. Unreached people groups have less than 2% evangelical Christians and less than 5% professing Christians.” - 100upg.org/#faqs
 - There are 7,406 unreached people groups in the world that make up 41.8% of the worlds population (3,255,123,000 people). (Joshuaproject.net)
- Mission field in the United States
 - In a 2020 survey by the Pew Research Center, **65% of adults in the United States identified themselves as Christians**. They were 75% in 2015 70.6% in 2014, 78% in 2012, 81.6% in 2001, and 85% in 1990. ([Wikipedia](https://www.pewresearch.org/2020/01/08/religious-identity/))
 - In 2020 Barna published that just one in four americans is a “practicing Christian”(<https://www.barna.com/research/changing-state-of-the-church/>)
 - Practicing Christians identify as Christian, agree strongly that faith is very important in their lives and have attended church within the past month.
 - Here in Livingston County 89% of the population (169,100) aren't apart of bible preaching, gospel believing churches, 62% of the county is totally unchurched (117,800).

So pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest for him to send laborers out into the harvest.

- Prayer is mysterious, but real work.

Praying knowing that the Lord has called you, as his disciples, into the harvest field.

