

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor
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18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834
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Matthew 9:35-10:27 “Christ’s Call for Missionary Workers”

(Read 9:35-38)

Intro. As Jesus began His ministry of teaching, preaching, and healing, He soon had large crowds following Him. People loved to hear Him preach and teach. They were amazed by the miracles He was doing. In fact, they were greater and more numerous than what the prophets of the Old Testament did. So in the early part of His ministry He was being followed by more people than any other Rabbi. It seemed as though the whole nation of Israel would turn to Him as their Messianic King.

But Jesus knew that the fickle crowds would someday turn against Him. In fact, the tide had already crested. Opposition from Israel’s leadership was growing. Jesus knew that He would be rejected by the people, and despised of men, just like Isaiah the prophet had prophesied. He knew that His greatest and most important work was not to perform miracles or even to teach. His greatest work was to suffer and die upon the cross. He knew that His death alone would make the forgiveness of sin possible. He knew that through His sacrifice men could find rest for their souls and peace with God.

Yet the death of Jesus on the Cross would do little good if no one heard about the good news of forgiveness that was provided through His sacrificial death. The Bible says that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. We are saved by faith in Christ, but we must first hear about Christ, and what He did to save us. So Jesus needed to prepare His disciples to go out, and tell the good news that Jesus had come to save us from our sins.

Our text today contains some of the teaching Jesus gave to His disciples concerning the work He was calling them into. And I believe that many of these verses apply to us today. After all, when Jesus gave His Great Commission to go into all the world and make disciples, He promised to be with them “until the end of the age.” The end of the age has not come yet, so the Great Commission is still in force. The need is greater than ever for God’s people to heed this call to go and work for the Savior, to tell the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ.

So let’s look at this text together, and see what we can learn about the missionary task of serving Jesus Christ. First of all, consider with me:

I. THE COMPASSION OF CHRIST

This is the foundation for all that I will say today. We read in v.36, “But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them....” The word translated “moved with compassion” (*splagchnizomai*) refers to a deep, gut feeling of compassion. In Christ we see that God is moved with compassion by the misery of mankind. He is not indifferent to our suffering.

Yet you may wonder why Jesus was so moved with compassion. Well our Scripture text tells us:

A. The Reason for His Compassion – In the last of v.36 we see that Christ was moved with compassion, “because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.” This is one of many times in the Bible that people are compared to sheep who need a shepherd (cf. Numbers

27:17; Psa. 23; Isa. 53:6). That is not a very flattering picture. Sheep are somewhat stupid, having a propensity to go astray and wander aimlessly. Lost sheep have no sense of direction. So they need someone to guide them in the right way. So the leaders of Israel has failed to provide good spiritual guidance for the people.

Not only do sheep need direction but also protection. Notice how Jesus described the people with two related words. The first (*skullo*) translated “weary” means, “to weary, harass, trouble, bother.” Here it is passive. They were “harassed, fatigued.” They were physically and emotionally weary and discouraged.¹ Picture a flock of sheep being harassed by a pack of wolves. They are running for their lives and being scattered. Even so, the Jews of Jesus’ day were harassed and bothered from all sides. They were harassed by their religious leaders, the Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, and rabbis. The very people who were supposed to be protecting the people were harassing the people. They were burdened and worn down with a strict, legalistic law. They had hundreds of regulations regarding keeping the Sabbath, and many other laws. They were also harassed by Roman soldiers, who could compel them into service for almost any reason. They were harassed and oppressed by tax collectors, though the vast majority were quite poor. In fact, it is estimated that 9 out of 10 persons lived close to or below the subsistence level. Even in Israel it was a classic peasant society.² On top of that, they were troubled with the difficult conditions of a sin cursed world, such as sickness.

The other word (*hripto*) means to “throw; or put down.” Nowhere else in the New Testament is the word translated “scattered.” It usually means to cast down. So the picture here is of a wolf who has not only harassed and chased after the sheep but also just captured and thrown down a sheep.³ So here we have a picture of sheep untended, unprotected, and oppressed. What a picture of sinners left to themselves and captured by the rabbis of that day. Jesus said to the Pharisees in Mt. 23:15, “you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.”

They were in such a condition because Jesus said they were “as sheep having no shepherd,” that is, no *true* shepherd (cf. Ezek. 34). The metaphor of a shepherd was used in the Old Testament to indicate a prophet, priest, or king. So Christ was grieved by the utter failure of both secular and religious leaders who not only failed to protect the common people from the wolves of society, but who became wolves themselves! So without Christ and Christlike servant leaders, people will be led astray, harassed and lost. After all, there are so many bad influences in this world. Multitudes are led astray by ungodly and false religious leaders. Think of the billion plus people who are led astray by Islamic leaders. Millions are perishing with the false creeds of Buddhism and Hinduism. Many wander into eternal darkness listening to false teachers within Christendom.

A group of servicemen asked their new chaplain if he believed in hell, and he smiled and told them that he did not. “Then you are wasting your time,” the men replied. “If there is no hell, we don’t need you; and if there is a hell, you are leading us astray. Either way, we’re better off without you!”⁴ Many people someday will end up in hell because of a lack of good spiritual leaders. How tragic!

Surely Christ is moved with compassion by the multitudes of our day. The number of unbelievers in this world is growing every day. In fact, the number of Americans reporting no religious preference has increased significantly since 1990, surpassing both Catholics and

¹ The 3 times the word is used in the epistles it means “to be discouraged, loose heart” (Gal. 6:9; Heb. 12:3, 5).

² http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0259-94222016000400046.

³ Cf. how the word is used in Luke 4:35, “And when the demon had thrown him in their midst....”

⁴ Told by Warren Wiersbe.

Evangelicals.⁵ Consider the multitudes of children who lack the advantage of growing up in a good, stable, loving 2-parent home. Many of these children are growing up without moral and spiritual guidance. So I'm not surprised to see an increase in moral degradation and corruption. Look around and see the youth and adults who are hooked on drugs and alcohol. They have found such pleasures to be dead end streets. Sexual abuse is on the rise. Look at the multitudes who are seeking the pleasures, riches, and fame of the world. Jim Carrey once said, "I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that it's not the answer."⁶ We have youth and adults who sink so low in despair that more and more are committing suicide. And if you look beyond our country, the condition of men is often even worse.

The amount of suffering both in our world and in the outer darkness of hell is beyond description. We could ignore it, and not be moved with compassion like Jesus. But notice also:

B. What Brought Out the Compassion – Our text says in v.36, "when He *saw* the multitudes...", that's when He was moved with compassion. So here we have our Lord teaching us how to look at people. The right emotion for a Christian looking on the Christless crowds is compassion, not anger or indifference or an attitude of self-righteous condemnation. On any Sunday there are thousands of people driving around, going shopping or elsewhere, who have not seen the inside of a church in years, and probably not one in 10 of all the people that *are* going to church ever think anything about them as they pass them by. For the most part we keep our distance from hurting people and don't even see them up close. And only about 3 in every 100 ever care enough to witness to the unchurched people that they see. We should look upon the multitudes and be moved with compassion the way Christ was.

So when you look upon people, look with compassion. Allow your heart to feel deeply for them. Consider them as someone for whom Christ died. Say to yourself, "There is a person who may need to hear the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ." We need motivation to witness, and a Christlike compassion is a powerful motivation. So let us follow the example of Jesus, and look upon the multitudes at home and around the world with compassion.

Then what shall we do? Having been moved, shall we do nothing? Surely not! Notice that this text teaches us how Christ would have us act, after such emotion of compassion has gripped us. When Jesus was moved with compassion, He always did something to help people (14:14; 15:32; 18:27; 20:34). It was not just an emotion. Yet emotion is useful. God gave us emotions like compassion to move us into action. Let us not be callous and indifferent. Let us act! So I want you to see not only the compassion of Christ, but secondly:

II. THE CALL OF CHRIST FOR WORKERS

Christ calls us to act in response to the hurting, harassed, misled, and dying multitudes. So how should we respond to the multitudes that are lost without Christ? Are we to call on the government to address these problems of humanity? Well the government has a God-given role to protect us from evildoers and provide justice for all. But I believe that secular government is wholly inadequate to address the deepest problems of humanity. How well has Communism and Marxism worked out in countries where it has been tried? And since our own government's war on poverty began in the 1960s, we have spent over 22 trillion and yet the poverty rate has been about the same since 1969 and the family structure is worse off.

⁵ <https://www.cnn.com/2019/04/13/us/no-religion-largest-group-first-time-usa-trnd/index.html>.

⁶ Reader's Digest, *Quotable Quotes*, March 2006, p.81.

So what can we do to make a real difference? Christ is the answer to the sin problem. His transformative work by means of the new birth, the Word of God, and the work of the Holy Spirit is what changes people into loving, peaceful and helpful members of the community. As we see in our text of Scripture, it takes workers to get the gospel of Christ out to people, so this transformative work can take place. So first, I want you to:

A. Recognize the Harvest Potential – Jesus said in v.37, “The harvest truly is plentiful...” Here He changing the metaphor from that of sheep in need to a bountiful harvest. The conditions that people were living under made them open to the Gospel of salvation and hope. Multitudes were flocking to hear Jesus preach and teach and give them hope.

Even so, with people facing a pandemic, job loses, injustice and civil unrest, you would think that people would be looking for answers. Except for hardened atheists and sinners, people should be more open to the gospel now than in the past several decades. So don’t think there’s no use trying to share the gospel and make a difference. “The harvest truly is plentiful...”

That being the case:

B. Pray that God Will Send Out Christian Workers – Jesus said in v.38, “Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” Prayer is the first answer to many of the problems we face. George Barna once reported that prayer is labeled as a top priority by less than one out of every 25 churches! May we be the one out of 25 churches! The prayer ministry is one of the most important ministries in our church, and yet few participate in group prayer. Are you involved in our prayer ministry?

Now one aspect of prayer is asking. In fact, the word translated “pray” is actually the simple word for “ask” or “beg.” What are we to ask? Notice that we are to ask God to “send out” workers into the world. We are to ask for laborers to harvest the large “crop” of souls that Jesus says are there and waiting. Multitudes need good spiritual guidance. They need to hear about Jesus.

Now how is God going to answer that prayer? Well the word translated “send out” (*ekballo*) is lit. “drive out, caste out.” In chapter 10:1 the same word is used to refer to the casting out of demons. So the word is used to refer to sending someone out with force, or at least with pressure. So we are to pray that God will awaken the sleeping multitudes of people in our churches who are doing little or nothing to advance the cause of Christ in this world.

God has His ways of sending out laborers into the field of lost souls. God may use circumstances. For example, in Acts 8:1 & 4 we see that God used persecution in Jerusalem to send out believers into Judea and Samaria to share the Gospel. God may close doors to less worthy endeavors. He will also give some inward compulsion, letting them know that He is calling them to preach, or calling them to missionary service. Paul had that inward compulsion. He wrote in 1 Cor. 9:16, “...necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!” In Jer. 20:9 the prophet Jeremiah said, “I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name. But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not.” Most people will not share the gospel without such compulsion.

Well that leads to my next point.

C. Heed the Call of Christ for Workers – Jesus said in v.37, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few.” That’s the problem. The great need, affirmed by Jesus, is the call for more workers. When Cheryl says to me, “The garbage is full,” she is not just giving information. To her, stating the need is the same as asking me to do something about it. Well, Jesus says that

there are too few Christian workers. It's like having a field full of corn, ready to be harvested, but no one is doing anything about it. How tragic! All that food that would feed the hungry is going to waste. To the crying shame of the church, untold millions are still untold. Even now thousands of language groups in the world that are without a single verse of Scripture.

One of the most important evangelistic events we have each year is Vacation Bible School. Yet if we do not have Vacation Bible School, it will not be just due to the pandemic but also due to a lack of workers. Very few have responded to our calls to volunteer. There is nothing new under the sun. Even in Jesus day He said, "the laborers are few."

Notice in 10:1 that Jesus calls the very people He commanded to pray. When you pray that God send out Christian workers, you will often find that God will then say to you, "Well why don't *you* go?" So as it turns out, we are to ask for *co*-laborers, for it is a serious thing to pray for the lost, because God will want to use you to help answer those prayers.

Another point to be made concerning this call for workers is that all types of people are needed in the Lord's service. Look over the names in vv.2-4. Represented there are people of different backgrounds. Some were quiet, some were boisterous. Some were educated, some were uneducated. These men were all laymen at one time. Jesus did not make one Rabbi of Israel an apostle. This call is not just for professionals. Christ's call for workers includes every believer.

So will you say "Yes" to the call of God? Will you become a preacher or missionary? Will you become some other type of vocational Christian worker? Will you say "yes" when our Nominating Committee ask you to serve?

Finally, for those who are willing to work for Jesus, notice with me:

III. THE COMMISSION OF CHRIST

After He called them, He commissioned them by giving them some important instructions. In chapter 10 we find these instructions. Like the apostles, we need instructions regarding what we are to do. We need training so we will know how to handle the different situations we will face. So what are we to do for Christ?

A. "Go" – In v.5 we see that He "sent out" the twelve. That word (*apostello*) is the verb form of the word "apostle." In v.2 the 12 disciples are called "apostles" for the first time in Matthew. They were now more than disciples. They were the King's ambassadors, sent out on a mission. Then in vv.5-7 we find the word "go" 3 times. First He told them where *not* to go, and then where they were to go. Initially these men were told to limit their activity to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." As Paul said, the Gospel was for the "Jew first." But the command given in vv.5, 6 was a temporary restriction which later on would be lifted, as in clearly seen in Mt. 28:19-20 and Acts 1:8.

Notice that Christ did not build a headquarters in Capernaum and bid them all to come to Him. He traveled *to* the cities and villages. Note "as you go" (v.7), indicating that they were to be traveling evangelists, speaking as they go. The road was to be their pulpit, and each man they met their audience.

So we must not wait until people come to church before we speak to them about Christ. We must be willing to go to them. Take your Christian faith with you to work, to school, to your neighborhood and elsewhere. And we must continue to send missionaries. There are communities and homes right here in America where Christ is hardly known. And we certainly need to send missionaries to other countries. There are many countries where less than 5% of the population has

heard the good news of Jesus Christ. Are you willing to go on a short-term mission trip? Are you willing to be trained and join our disaster relief team? If so, you will be on call to go and minister in the name of Christ on short notice.

B. Preach – In v.7 we see Christ’s command to preach (*kerusso*). That word described a herald, one who delivered a message to the people of some community. In that day they did not have printing presses and certainly did not have television or Internet communication. Mass communication was entrusted to a herald who delivered the message in the public square. So Jesus told them to preach the gospel publicly. Then in v.27 he said, “Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops.” I believe that the public preaching God’s Word is still important today. I am glad that through television and Internet I can preach to hundreds of other people, including people living in dozens of other nations.

Now notice the message we are to share. He said in v.7, “preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” The promised Messianic King had come, and they were to proclaim the good news of His coming. If Israel had believed in Him, God would have fulfilled His promise to establish the Messianic Kingdom of God on earth. But they did not believe in Jesus, so the earthly Kingdom is yet to come when Jesus comes again. But in another sense, the spiritual Kingdom of God has already come. Jesus has died for our sins. He rose from the dead and was exalted as Lord to the right hand of God the Father. Now the Gospel message is to believe in Jesus as your Savior, trusting in His sacrificial death on the cross. Then yield your life to Him as Lord. Every life, every home, and every church where Christ reigns as Lord will experience the blessings of the kingdom now.

Is God calling you to preach? Will you answer God’s call?

C. Trust God for Enablement – When it comes to preaching, or witnessing, or many other types of Christian service, many will not go because they feel so inadequate. I’m sure that group of fishermen and other disciples felt inadequate as well. So Christ gave them the divine power they needed to do His work; for He always equips and empowers those whom He calls into service. Now this text of Scripture brings out at least 2 ways that Jesus equips His people for service:

1. Spiritual Authority – Notice in v.1 that “He gave them power over unclean spirits....” That word “power” (*exousia*) is actually “authority.” It is not only raw power, but the right to use that power. Christ did not send them out and say, “Go and do the best you can.” No, He transferred His authority to them. He gave them authority to cast out demons and to heal the sick. God confirmed their message with special signs and wonders. God knew that the Jews would need such signs (1 Cor. 1:22).

I believe that God continues to give authority to preach, but I do not believe that God has given us the authority to do the same signs as the apostles. But we do have authority to proclaim the Gospel. When Jesus gave His Great Commission, He started by saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” You have a God-given right to share your faith. The devil may object. Some government authority may object. But always remember that the authority of God is greater than any human or diabolical authority.

2. Speaking Ability – Jesus said in vv.19-20, “But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.” This has nothing to do with the issue of preparing sermons. And the only underlying principle that applies to

us today is this: God will enable you to speak, and will help you know what to say, if you answer His call.

I know this truth in my own experience. I grew up with a speech impediment. I stuttered and stammered, and had trouble getting my words out. You think you have a fear of public speaking, imagine my fear! I was powerless to speak with any fluency. Yet, when God did a great work in my life one summer at youth camp, I felt that God was calling *me* to preach. I could not understand why, and I resisted that call for months. Then I heard a sermon on tape by Dr. Adrian Rogers. Through that message I learned that God's power is more easily seen in weak human instruments. And so trusting in God's power, the day after my 18th birthday I announced my call to preach before a Sunday morning crowd of about 1,000, and for the first time I was able to speak fluently! I learned in my own experience that what God calls you to do, He enables you to do.

So if God wants you to be a preacher, He will enable you. If God wants you to be a missionary, He will help you. If God wants you to sing a solo, or teach a class, or share your faith, He will enable you if you trust Him.

Conclusion: Has God called you to preach? Surrender to that call today. Has God called you to become a missionary? Surrender to that call today. Has God called you to become a vocational Christian worker? Surrender to that call today. Has God called you to serve in the ministry of this church in some way? Then surrender to that call today! Membership is required for most of our service opportunities, so will you respond to the call to join our church? The harvest is plenteous, but the laborers are few.

Sources: William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture, Vol 6* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); John Phillips, *Exploring The Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible [Ver. 5:30]* (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Loyal: Matthew* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1980); Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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