

Matthew 9:35-38 4 Steps for effective Mission

35 And 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. 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.”

V.35 is a summary statement of the ministry of Jesus. It's almost identical to the statement we saw in 4:23 prior to the sermon on the mount. Matthew uses it here for two purposes like a hinge.

In looking back, it summarizes the ministry of Jesus. In looking forward, it does the same thing, but with a new twist. Instead of Jesus doing ministry alone, now He is going to do ministry through His disciples. **10:1, “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.”** So they've been following Him, watching Him, learning from Him. And now things are shifting from something they are observing to something they are participating in.

It's that moment in class where you move from lecture to lab. The same language will continue right up to chapter 28 when the resurrected Jesus **18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” -Matthew 28:18-20**

The Kingdom has come in Jesus and begins to spread out into the world through His disciples. Jesus does not stop His mission, but begins working through His disciples. And that transition is where we find ourselves today in 9:35-38.

So we are moving from observation to participation. It's getting more personal and more practical for us. The mission of God. It's something we participate in, nobody's in the bleachers. In can be hard to get off the bleachers and get in, maybe a sin issue, or lack of knowledge or understanding. This morning Jesus is calling us to engagement in the mission. And in this text Jesus calls us to a very simple method to bring success.

4 steps to successful missional engagement, these build one on the other. Eyes that see the lost, hearts that break for the lost, lips that pray to God, and lives that go to the lost.

Let's pray.

1. Eyes that see the lost (36a)

36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

It's a obvious point, but a vital point. Jesus sees the crowds in front of Him. He's not blind to them. Jesus says that these crowds are harassed and helpless, literally torn and thrown down. And He compares them to sheep without a shepherd. these sheep are beat up, bruised, bleeding, lying in danger and about to die. That's what happens when they don't have a shepherd.

Why do sheep need shepherds? Sheep are dumb creatures. They are referred to as the dumbest of all animals. There was a story in Turkey if a sheep that decided to walk off a cliff. not too long ago of a herd of 1500 sheep that ran off a cliff. It all started because one sheep decided to walk off. And then another guy thinks he'll follow, and another, and so on. This looks like a great idea! Let's go! 400 died and broke the fall for the 1100 that fell on top of them. That's a lot of cotton.

They are also **defenseless**. They have no special power, no claws, no bark, just a little baa. Real scary. Can't even run away. And they are **directionless**. They don't know where to go. They wander. You put a sheep in a perfect environment. Guess what they do? They walk away.

That's why they need shepherds.

Though Jesus may certainly be referring to their physical condition, He's pointing to the deeper reality of their spiritual condition. They spiritually are without a shepherd. And the Bible points to Jesus as the True Shepherd of the Sheep.

Ezekiel 34: “23 And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. 24 And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken.”

Of course there is Psalm 23, the Lord is my shepherd, pointing to Jesus, the One who will lead us through the valley of death to green pastures and still waters.

So the division Jesus brings to the world are those that are under His shepherding care and those that aren't. A division between believers and unbelievers.

Do we see the crowds? Do we see the lost? What that means is not just physically seeing them, but spiritually seeing them. Jesus sees these crowds and notices their spiritual condition, they are harassed and helpless.

Seeing people as valuable and in need of Jesus.

This is a rebuke against our self-consuming control. We are about ourselves. I'm going to work for myself. I'm going to the store for myself. I'm so fixated on what I have to do I miss the people before me.

And it might mean that they look like they have it all together, but the reality of their situation is that they are lost, they are harassed and helpless, in the grip of their sin and the forces of the enemy, powerless to escape. We need special glasses like 3D in the movies. It's a certain posture as well as discernment.

2/3rds of the world is without the Shepherd. 7,000 people groups have little to no witness for Christ.

Many of us go our day and never consider that the person next to us is harrassed and helpless. Jesus would you open our eyes to see the lost.

And seeing the lost, how should our hearts respond?

2. Hearts that break (36b)

When Jesus saw the crowds, He had compassion on them. This is a very unique word ascribed only to Jesus in the gospels, outside of being used in a few parables. The point is its a divine compassion. This is not human pity, feeling sorry for someone. This is the divine heart breaking for its creatures.

The word compassion, broken down, means to suffer with. To enter into suffering. The God and Creator of the universe, who dwells in unapproachable light, coming in the flesh to enter into the suffering of humanity. Chooses not to stay distant, but comes near, incarnated as one of us. He's not cold to the suffering of humanity. Hebrews says He was made man in every way that He might be faithful and merciful.

We must follow the master's heart here, having a hearts that would break for the lost. It's great to see the lost, and have nice and tight doctrine. And be able to articulate with great fluency matters of heaven and hell and salvation. That's great. It's a greater thing, if you see the lost and you weep for them.

Like the story of the Good Samaritan, how many people had to pass by the broken guy on the side of the road until the good samaritan decided to stop. They all saw him, but saw him as an inconvenience and a burden, not as someone worth helping.

You weep because they are harrassed and helpless, and you have a heart that loves them, and a heart that understands them, because you were once harrassed and helpless yourself, apart from Christ. You've received such grace and mercy in your helpless state, and you can't do anything else but break for those that are still apart from Christ.

Our hearts must break. When is the last time you were overwhelmed with compassion, or wept for the lost. I'm not saying everything hinges on emotion here. But we get emotional about a lot of other stuff that's not as important.

D.A. Carson articulates that "Compassion in ministry is not so much the characteristic of a certain type of personality, as the characteristic of the person with a certain set of priorities."

If we aren't compassionate... we can't chalk it up to personality or gender differences. Oh those are the cryers, those are the sensitive ones. Maybe even let the women be compassionate, us guys got to be strong. This is a matter of godliness. True manhood involves compassion. Jesus wept.

The problem is We don't care about others. We don't care about the glory of God. That's the problem with cold hearts. We need to repent of not caring. We need to repent of being consumed with ourselves.

Compassion in the Bible is something that drives action. When we see Jesus well up with compassion, He does this often right before a miracle. It's entering into the suffering determined to do something about that suffering. Compassion demands action.

So what is the action? Jesus tells us.

3. Lips that pray (37-38)

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."

Jesus sees the crowds, He fills up with compassion, and then He turns to His disciples and says to pray. Why? Because the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. The problem does not appear to be with the harvest. It's a problem of workers. We need more workers.

And by pointing them to prayer, there is something critical about the mission that Jesus is trying to communicate.

First, Jesus is Lord of the harvest. We are praying to the Lord of the harvest. It's His harvest. Prayer by definition puts the focus off of the disciples and onto God. Jesus couldn't be any more clear here—the mission is God's mission. Eyes off of yourselves and onto God. We're being sent into His harvest. It belongs to Him. He's over it, He owns it. He's the chief farmer that is producing the crop by His labor, His life and death and resurrection, and now He's asking us to go collect. The harvest is plentiful. That hard work has already been done, the clearing, tilling, planting, all done, and the crop is now ripe for picking. It's time to cash in. There is an abundant opportunity.

We aren't the ones responsible for converting souls. That's what Jesus does. We can't save anyone. Jesus saves. We are going with the message of salvation that is in Jesus and from Jesus, And God has readied people to receive. This should encourage us and free us up.

John 10:16, "And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd."

And in Acts we see Jesus speaking to the apostle Paul.

Acts 18:10, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, 10 for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people."

They are there Paul. My sheep are there. They don't know it yet, they just need you to come speak the gospel to them. They will listen. We are to be faithful as witnesses. We are to go on speaking and not be silent. God will bring the fruit. We pray because its God's Mission.

Second, we pray because we need God's power. There is this sending aspect to it. And sending involves going in the power and authority that the Sender supplies. We will not be successful in our own strength. Mission without prayer is like trying to turn a light on without plugging it into the wall. We need His power. As with any spiritual endeavor, we need the Lord to bear fruit through us.

The sending and empowering of Jesus disciples climaxes in the great commission in Matthew 28, followed by Pentecost in Acts. **Luke 24:47 ... repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."**

Wait until you receive power from on high. Jesus ascends to the Father and sends the Holy Spirit. As believers, we all have the power of the Holy Spirit, generally. Eph. 1, the same power that rose Christ from the dead is in you. Then there is a particular power, where the Holy Spirit will fill you for certain tasks. Eph 5:18, be being filled with the spirit. And in Acts, talking about believers, there are repeated fillings for the task of ministry.

So we see the lost. Our hearts break. Our lips are driven to prayer. Prayer fixes our hope on God and readies us for action. And that's our next point.

4. Lives that go (37-38)

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."

By praying this way we are attaching ourselves to the power source and opening ourselves up for how God would use us. Implied in the prayer, is the prayer of **Isaiah, "Here I am, send me."**

In fact, now as we scope out of this passage, all of us, as believers, are the sent ones. We are the sent ones, in battle, praying for re-enforcements. Prayer is asking God for re-enforcements. We can't pray this prayer without going ourselves.

We are all to be going. "Go, therefore, into all the world."

This means none of us are on the bleachers in the mission of God. If we are believers than we have already been sent. At salvation we are also given our commission. The question is, are you going? God has good works for you to walk in. Are you going?

We've wrongly divided the church into the goers and the not goers. Even goers and senders, though I like those categories when it comes to particular mission fields, it confuses our understanding of mission in our immediate context.

Let me put it this way. *Does the church have a mission, or does God's mission have a church?* If we get these reversed we open ourselves up to all kinds of missional degeneration and lethargy, and we relegate mission to one thing among many that we do as a church. Rather the entire life of the church is lived on mission.

What it doesn't mean is that we create a missional divide among christians. Though some are uniquely called and uniquely gifted, all are generally called and gifted for the mission. What we can't do is see the missionaries as a being in a class of their own and that causing us to check out. That's what they do. No. it's what we do. All of us. Inclusive. We are all living on mission. We are the body the Christ, made up of very different people, with different giftings, in different seasons of life, with different levels of influence, and so on, and so it is, we are Christ's spiritual body, on this earth.

Does that mean that we move overseas? To an unreached people group? Maybe. That's up to the Lord to direct you. It's wise to ask why you should stay? He very well may call any one of us to go. Are we willing.

This text is challenging us to open ourselves up to the call of God on our lives. How are we going in the here and now, in our immediate context. We've been sent to Cary, and Raleigh. That's where we live. That's where we work. That's where we play. That's where God has us in His sovereignly orchestrated plan to reach the nations. The mission started in Jerusalem and here we are.

As we consider, individually and as a church, what it means to go, is that we go in worship.

"Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't." -John Piper

If our aim alone is missions for the sake of missions, we have missed it. We are propelled by God's glory and for God's glory. We go rooted in the firm, lavished grace of Jesus. If we are going out to inspire worship, we first must be worshiping. We may stumble and fall, we must be rooted in grace.

We can only worship as we fix all our attention on Jesus and what He has done for us. Missions is a response to the Chief Shepherd, who has laid down His life for the sheep. We were the harrassed and helpless. Christ became the man of Sorrows, like a sheep led to the slaughter, so that we would not perish. That is an authority and presence that causes us to gladly sign up, and its a message that causes us to gladly offer.

Here we are, Lord. Send us.