

COMPASSIONATE SHEPHERD

INTRO: Good morning, we are continuing our series in Matthew, the upside down kingdom. As you drive around the **country** side right now, you will notice it is **harvest** time for blueberries and getting close for some grasses and grains. Most of us have gone berry picking with little kids. What a **wonderful** experience for small children to get in on the harvest. When we go as families to a **You-Pick** farm, it is a wonderful time of sampling the harvest, snacks that mom brought, maybe lemonade, short breaks in the **shade** of the bushes, day dreaming about blueberry **pancakes**. A very relaxing and memorable time. For our friends that **own** high production farms, harvest time is not relaxing. It is a time that the owner is laser focused and there is a **high** sense of urgency. The owner **hopefully** has highly dependable and trustworthy managers to help organize, coordinate, and lead hard working laborers in the harvest. A **tremendous** amount of capital and labor has been invested, not to have beautiful rows of plants filling the landscape, but to **produce**, to have a yield that brings profit. Moreover, the owner has to manage **workers** in a way that they enjoy the work, they feel like a **partner** in the harvest, and also share in the **reward** of the harvest. For those of you that are farmers, or know farmers, you know the **look** in their faces, the **serious** tone in their voices, and their **lack** of sleep during harvest time! While I share the **Word** with you this morning, please keep in mind these **observations** of the **intensity**, the **focus**, and the **care** during harvest. Most of the people that heard Jesus speak, understood pastoral, horticultural, and agricultural concepts. They did not have a local Roth's to grab a sack of **wheat**, some lamb **chops**, **apples**, and **donuts**. The passage I will be preaching on today is end of Matt 9, verses 35-38. It is a very nice **summation** of Jesus's **early** ministry which also reveals a very important attribute of the triune God, **COMPASSION**. Jesus knew the idea of harvest was needed to help express what His ministry meant to His followers. When the words harvest and laborer were used, Jesus had their attention.

- I. One of the best things about studying God's Word is studying the life of Jesus. What did Jesus **do**? What did He **say**? Where did He **go**? How did He **respond**? What does He **think**? Let's dive into the text and learn more of Him.

Vs 35 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.

Don't miss the simple things in the Word of God. **Jesus went**. It was not enough that He **knew** what was needed. That He **knew** what great need lost souls had, but He **went**, He had to go. **Before** He sent any of His followers, He personally went after the lost in Israel. According to Luke 4:43 Jesus was **sent** by His father to preach from town to town, anointed to preach the good news

to the poor. He was sent to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed. When people tried to keep Him long, He always moved on pursuing the lost. What **drove** Him? What made the Son of Man forsake comfort and ease? Love & Compassion. Our Lord Jesus went to **ALL** the Jewish cities and villages. Our Heavenly Father and His Son, are **not** respecters of persons. Jesus **went** to and **proclaimed** the good news to the full **spectrum** of people. Listen to this long list of people that He went to: men, women, and children. Rich and poor, healthy and sick, young and old, sophisticated and the simple, educated, the ignorant, the self-righteous and sinners, zealots and hippocrates, Pharisees or demon possessed, rulers or slaves, soldiers, tax-collectors, fishermen, prostitutes, doctors and priests. Are you kidding me? It is incredible to think, every tribe, every language, every nation will be represented in heaven. If you look at the church abroad, the churches in America, and the rest of the world, you will see evidence of this broad love.

The church is full of every type of human, every type of sinner. No particular race or culture, not even the darkest of sinners is denied. Once a humbled soul repents, and receives the free gift of salvation, he enters the body of Christ. Not by works or amazing **self-effort**, but by faith alone. What **truly** good news He has for all mankind. The gospel of the Kingdom was **continually** on His lips. Not all who heard Him believed, not all thought His news was good news. If you don't see your sin, your need for forgiveness, your utter hopelessness, you will NOT think it is good news that God wants to forgive you, that He wants to forget your sins. You will think it is a joke and a waste of your time. For those of **us** who truly know Him and have been **born again**, it was certainly not a waste of time. I am so thankful He came for me, that He had **compassion** on me, that He broke the **chains** of sin. That He now calls me His **son**, His **friend**.

When Jesus preached, He also **healed**. To heal someone without giving the gospel would not be **true** healing. To preach the gospel and not **expect** healing of soul would also be unreasonable. The healings and miracles of Jesus helped **confirm** He was the Messiah, the Son of God. They also revealed His **compassionate** heart to the **lost** and **hurting**. I am sure He was grieved when those people He healed did not return to follow Him, to worship Him, taking His compassion for granted. Healing of the body was not His primary ministry. Healing did not guarantee repentance. **Shepherding** souls into the **kingdom** of God was His focus. **Proclaiming** the kingdom of God by revealing Himself as the **way**, the **truth**, and the **life** was **His** ministry. How else do we see His actions revealing His heart?

Let's look back at the Matt 9 passage.

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

As Jesus went through the region, He **saw** crowds everywhere He went. Who were these crowds? This gospel account described them as **harassed** and **helpless**, like sheep without a shepherd. I don't want you to miss just how **sad** and **destitute** these people were. Don't forget chapter 4 of Matthew describing these people dwelling in **darkness** and in the shadow of **death**.

Imagine a lot of people, some without homes, or without jobs, perhaps they were too sick or diseased to take care of themselves. **Outcasts** or **wanderers** not trusted, **not** welcome. They could have been Samaritans or other neighboring cultures. I suspect the majority were Jews whose lives **had** seen **better** days. Local villages or towns would have seen them as an unhealthy **burden** on their communities. Within Jewish culture was the idea that if you were **poor** or **sick**, it was most likely due to **sin**, your sin or your parents. The book of Job has many chapters of his "friends" accusing him of secret sin which caused his horrible trial. This kind attitude made it easy for the healthy and rich justify themselves of their sins.

Let me pause to define some words here, and build a bigger picture of these crowds. The key words describing the crowds in verse 36 were harassed and helpless. I will define the original Greek words.

- **Harassed** – people who are **distressed**, vexed, **troubled**, annoyed, and **stripped**. Perhaps they were robbed or cheated? Had they spent all their money on hopeful cures, had they been chased out of their hometowns due to some controversy or sin? Were they wandering in shame and hopeless?

The second word is...

- **Helpless** – dispirited, the **cast down**, to cast, fling, toss, **throw down**, to set down with haste and lack of care. The same word is used in Matthew 15:30 the **lame**, blind, **crippled**, mute were cast down at Jesus' feet, and He healed them. As I studied this word, I kept picturing an old truck pulled over on a logging road, with a guy littering, hastily shoving an old washing machine out with some other garbage, making it someone else's problem. Imagine the look on the people **casting down** a lame person like he was **garbage** and seeing Jesus raise the person perfectly **whole**. What they saw as garbage, Jesus has compassion on and makes something wonderfully new, wonderfully valuable! Jesus also **observed** the crowds as sheep **without** a shepherd. This metaphor is different than the passages referring to born again believers as His sheep. This is more in line with the observation of Israel's shepherds found in Jeremiah 23:2 ***you have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them.*** A few verses later we see the prophecy of Jesus and His followers.

vs 4 I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the LORD.

Jesus, the **Chief Shepherd**, could not help but care for people in their **hopeless** state. Lost or threatened sheep **always** motivate a true shepherd to do as he **ought to**. Good shepherds have an **innate** ability to **feed, water, lead, and protect** sheep. We must confess the reality that sheep are not intelligent, they are utterly **defenseless**, and they are **directionless**. In 2005 a desperate sheep ended his life by leaping off a 150 foot cliff. He did not know that all 1500 sheep of his flock would follow him. Surprisingly enough only 450 died. The early jumpers provided a soft **fluffy** landing for those in the rear of the flock. In 2017 a bear chased a sheep and 200 of his flock went off a cliff in their defenseless panic. **Humans** are a lot like sheep. God created us to truly **need** Him, to **follow** Him, for Him to **protect** and **feed** us. When sheep don't have a shepherd, they are in a **sad** and **pathetic** state. The heart of Jesus is **revealed**

by His actions. **Harassment** and **helplessness** are the **objects** of compassion. Misery is the **object** of mercy. The heart of God is to **seek, save, and shepherd**. The Lord draws near to the **meek and lowly**, the broken and **contrite**. He **saw** these **hopeless** crowds. If anyone today feels harassed or helpless, He **also** sees **you** in your situation. You are **not** invisible to Him. Let's continue with the last two verses.

III. vs 37-38 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."

Alright, we are told the harvest is **plentiful**. Plentiful meaning an abundant crop, requiring a lot of labor. The use of the word harvest also creates a **sense of urgency** that has been effective for all generations from the **disciples** till now.

The urgency is set because there is simply **not** enough labor to get the harvest in before it's too late.

The concept of harvest is throughout scripture starting in **Genesis** and on to **Revelation**. In Matthew 13 and Revelation 14 it refers to the harvest as the very **end** of the age, the earth is fully **ripe**. **Angels** are reapers gathering all evil and casting them into a fiery furnace. In Matthew 9 the harvest is not the end of ages, but a field not **fully** ripe, requiring additional **sowing**, watering, **laboring**, and reaping.

In John 4 the harvest is described as **white** and ready but it talks about sowers, laborers, and reapers. It speaks of people currently **reaping** fruit unto eternal life along with **rewards**, not reaping evil like the last day angels.

We see that Jesus walked through the regions, He saw the lost sheep of Israel, He saw **Samaritans** and **Gentiles**. He saw them all as a field **ripened** white to harvest. The reaping **came** through and still **comes** through the ongoing ministry of Jesus, **asking** His followers to pray for more laborers. Again, looking at another agricultural passage, we are reminded that we work **with** God in the harvest; **1 Corinthians 3:6-9 - I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷ So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. ⁸ He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. ⁹ For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.**

Looking back at Matthew 9:38 I think it is interesting the harvest **boss**, the **owner** of the field, the **Lord** of the harvest, asked His followers to pray **earnestly** for more labor. This word earnestly could be translated beg. **Beg** the Lord to send forth laborers. No one cares more for the harvest than the Lord and **yet** He wants **us** to pray for **more** labor. Why would the owner of the farm ask His laborers to beg for more labor? Do you see the upside down kingdom? He wants us to join His **heart**, His **compassion** for the lost and to **pray** for laborers to go into the harvest fields. We should **not** be surprised when after praying for more labor that the Holy **Spirit** shows **us** how we can be a part of the work. Jesus wonderfully acknowledges the **power** of prayer to **change** hearts and motivate people to serve Him.

We should all be inspired and challenged with Jesus's compassionate drive to share the gospel, to set the captives free. You may be thinking: Well, I see the clear call to pray for more laborers, but what else should I do or expect? Consider the breakdown on what Jesus did in His travelling

ministry. He **went**, He **taught** and **preached**, He had **compassion**, He **shepherded**, He **fed**, and He **healed**.

How can you get involved **with** or **support** any of those activities? If you are immediately thinking, "I am not a pastor, **evangelist**, or a missionary," Don't **panic**. There are many gifts that the Holy Spirit has given to build up His church. Please consider 1 Peter 2:5: You are a holy and royal priesthood now that you are in Christ. The expectation on you is to offer up **spiritual sacrifices**, and to show forth the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness. As you grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, you will find yourself praying for laborers, for ministries, praying for the lost. Eventually finding yourself serving in them as well.

I will close with these powerful verses revealing why Jesus wanted us to pray for more laborers. John 17:17-21. Listen to the prayer of Jesus.

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you **sent me** into the world, so I have **sent them** into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me **through their word**, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have **sent me**.