

Motives in Service

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[0 : 00] Tonight we're going to be in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 9, verses 35 to 38. Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching 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. As followers of Jesus, we are called to be the servant of all, putting ourselves last.

Today I want to use this passage to look at our motives in service. So easily it can be pride, obligation, or fear. But these are all flawed.

To fuel our actions, our motives must align with Jesus himself. So let's look at what motivated Jesus in this text. We see Jesus' motivation is compassion for the people he is with.

[1 : 18] He sees them as lost sheep, harassed, and helpless. Before we explore this further, let's put the passage in context. We are in Matthew's account of Jesus' life.

He repeatedly reminds us that Jesus is the Messiah and Savior that the Jews are waiting for, through explaining the Old Testament scripture. Jesus has been passing through the lands, displaying his power, and he has been teaching about God's will and kingdom.

Jesus is willing to cope with the crowds, jostling to see him. Demanding miracles of him, doubting and rejecting him.

Endless lines of tired and complaining people. Masses just waiting for him to evict these ruthless Romans. Jesus desires to face these crowds on a daily basis.

He didn't need to prove himself. He didn't need their praises. He didn't need to gain authority. He had all this when he was on his throne in heaven. He had chosen to humble himself, leaving all these behind.

[2 : 28] He had chosen to get alongside them, to share mankind's suffering, to pour out his compassion. We remember again John 3.16.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. God so loved the world.

His love was his motivation. Here Jesus saw the crowds as sheep without a shepherd. An image we may have heard many times, but what does it mean?

Let's try and draw some explanations from scripture. Firstly, Psalm 119, verse 176, says, I have strayed like a lost sheep.

Seek your servant, for I have not forgotten your commands. The psalmist has openly confessed that he has gone away from God and his commands, but he longs for God to strengthen him so that he can follow them.

[3 : 33] The Bible is littered with individuals and nations who disobey God's commands, looking for satisfaction in earthly desires. Likewise, we do the same.

We look for lasting satisfaction in work, relationships, or hobbies. Good things, but not capable of eternal satisfaction. When idolized, they can cause us to stray away from God's commands.

The second illustration is from Luke 15, verses 3 to 7. Then Jesus told them this parable. Suppose one of you has a hundred street and loses one of them.

Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home.

Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, Rejoice with me. I have found my lost sheep. I tell you that in the same way, there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who

repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

[4 : 48] Here Jesus makes a direct comparison of a man wandering from God and sinning to a sheep wandering from the flock. So when Jesus sees the crowd as wandering sheep, he sees them for what they are, sinners, people who have rejected him, his Father, and the Holy Spirit.

Yet he loves them despite this. He longs for them to know him. He sees them as precious. He wants to rejoice and celebrate just because he has found them and brought them home. He cares for them. The third image is in what we read earlier in Ezekiel, but I will focus on Ezekiel 34, 11-12. For this is what the Sovereign Lord says, I myself will search for my sheep and look after them.

I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. These verses proclaim God as the shepherd for the lost sheep.

They have strayed, but God promises to seek out Israel once they were scattered. Likewise, through his Son, he promises to seek us out once we have strayed.

[6 : 06] We can trust in and be thankful for this promise. To review these three texts, why does Jesus see the crowd as lost like sheep without a shepherd?

One answer would be that they had departed from the God who loved them. They looked to the world to satisfy and to find contentment not in him, but in being full of things around them.

They had disobeyed God's commands. Another answer for the crowd being lost can be drawn from Ezekiel in that they are lost because they didn't have good teachers pointing them to God, but rather false teachers exploiting and failing the people.

Israel had false teachers proclaiming religiosity as the means to knowing God. But today there are many false gospels, objects and dreams that people put their hope in to satisfy.

The crowds have gone astray looking to be healthy, wealthy and wise. God has moved to the periphery. In doing so, they have sinned against God and God alone.

[7 : 15] What's the consequence of straying? Let's reflect on our own lives prior to coming to put our hope and trust in Christ as our Lord or those times when we forget God's love for us and we wander.

We can feel helpless at seeing the tasks around us. We can feel restless, always looking for the next thing to satisfy or we are impatient with the lack of fruits of our labour.

We can feel exhausted, unable to keep going. We can feel worthless, struggling to find our value and identity in the things around us. We can feel lost as to what is the purpose and hope for our actions.

Our joys don't last, our sufferings leave us bitter. We blame others, we curse and we cry. These emotions are not unique to us. So for those not in the body of Christ, let's not assume they are satisfied.

Like us, they are in the same fallen, broken world that we are in with similar anxieties, trials and pains. They are often harassed and helpless.

[8 : 25] So let's realise their need for the same compassion that we were shown. As we do this, try and see people through the eyes of God. Through the gospel they follow, what they put their hope in.

Let's long to save them from false teachers, all the while remembering that God promised to be the shepherd. Jesus came in response to be a true teacher, pointing and leading them to God.

Jesus came to show the path, drawing people back to himself. How will he do this? John 10, verse 11, Jesus says, I am the good shepherd.

The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Jesus says this, but he knows that he will lay down his life willingly for us on the cross. He knows we have strayed, he knows we are all sinners, and we are helpless by ourselves.

But in dying for us on the cross, he makes a path for us to return to the green pastures of God's kingdom so that we can see and know God's love.

[9 : 33] Let's daily remind ourselves of the cost it was to find us and bring us back, the anguish, pain, and the tears of the cross, willingly taken out of compassion and a boundless love.

We are quick to forget this. We wonder at what man has made and get lost in our task lists and work. We overlook the broken relationships between one another and with God.

We forget the reason he made us so that we can bask in his love and worship him. And as we relish in our Father's intimate love, we have compassion for those around us who do not yet know him,

who don't have the Father's rest, who struggle looking for answers, who are wandering like lost sheep.

We will move on to how Jesus' compassion manifested. He taught, proclaimed the gospel, and he healed, all of which the Holy Spirit can continue to do through us.

As well as this, on the back of what he has witnessed, Jesus calls his disciples to pray. But first he said, the harvest is plentiful, but the work is a few. What does Jesus mean by the harvest?

[10:46] If we look at Matthew 13, 24 to 30, Jesus told them another parable. The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away.

And when the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. The owner's servants came to him and said, Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field?

Where then did the weeds come from? An enemy did this, he replied. The servants asked him, Do you want us to go and pull them up? No, he answered, because while you're pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them.

Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time, I will tell the harvesters, first collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned. Then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.

The harvest is the individuals who will be brought into the kingdom of God. The weeds are those that reject God. So in saying the harvest is plentiful, the crowds are people who can be saved.

[12:00] Yes, they have gone astray, but they can be brought in. By what means does God bring them in? His work is. What are Jesus' disciples called to do?

Pray, asking the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field. So let's pray regularly and earnestly for people to go to share this good news of a Christ who died for us, restoring our relationship with a loving God so that those who are lost can confess and turn from their sins and their desires to go astray so that then they can receive a hope and assurance of an eternal life.

We too often forget the power of prayer, but as we lay our hopes and desires before the Lord, he will establish them. Plans and desires by themselves will not succeed unless they are in line with God's will and this can only be achieved through prayer.

Next, we shall look at how this prayer is answered in the next chapter, Matthew 10, verses 5 to 8. These twelve, Jesus sent out with the following instructions.

Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, proclaim this message. The kingdom of heaven has come near.

[13:29] Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. They are to be the answer to their own prayer.

They went themselves. The disciples were called to go to Israel first because throughout the Old Testament there had been signs of Jesus' coming. They had the covenant promises.

They were waiting for God's Messiah. Therefore, they had been prepared to receive the gospel. Later it would be time for the good news to come to the rest. This was God's plan.

Likewise, God commands us as the people have put their hope in Jesus to be workers in the harvest field. We don't know who will respond, but we know God is sovereign and he alone can save.

Our walk before an almighty God is not measured by the successes of our conversations, but rather our obedience and desire to serve God. God's love.

[14:32] So let's be the answer to our own prayers to willingly listen to the call to gather in the sheep by telling them the good news of the gospel, that there is a good shepherd who laid down his life for all.

So to give this a practical application, firstly, we need to remind ourselves of God's love and compassion, how this displayed itself in him becoming man, pouring himself out for us.

We do this by dwelling and meditating on God's word of the Bible, allowing the spirit to use the words to change our hearts and desires. We must also remind ourselves of God's blessings for us, his promises and his nature.

God doesn't change, doesn't love us any less, doesn't forget about us. We forget him, what he did, and that he longs for us to find our rest in him.

As we do this, we are filled with God's love so that it overflows into our relationships with others.

Secondly, we need to change our perspectives of people, no longer see them through the world's perspective of satisfaction, achievement, and status, but rather through Jesus' perspective of their

relationship to God.

[15 : 53] We must see them as the weeds to be burned unless they repent, as the sheep that are lost and helpless as we once were, their pains, their struggles, their frustrations, and their sorrows. In doing so, we will nurture compassion and longing for people to find a sure hope and lasting rest in God. We want them to experience the same love that we have and have the privilege of being able to offer.

Let me tell you a quick story of a famous evangelist, Dwight L. Moody. When D.L. Moody was in London during one of his tours, several British clergymen visited him.

They wanted to know how and why this poorly educated American was so effective in proclaiming the gospel. Moody took the three men to the window of his hotel room and asked each in turn what they saw.

One by one, the men described the people in the park below. Then Moody looked out the window with tears rolling down his cheeks. What do you see, Mr. Moody?

[17 : 06] asked one of the men. I see countless thousands of souls that will one day spend eternity in hell if they do not find the saviour. Moody had God's perspective and God's love.

Let's do the same. Thirdly, let's not forget a reliance on prayer. Mark 14, 36. Jesus prays, yet not what I will, but what you will.

Jesus here is in the Garden of Gethsemane facing his own crucifixion. He longs to not have to go through the pain and suffering, but he acknowledges God as Lord of all and that he knows what is best for his life.

As we pray, we also acknowledge this and that he is Lord over the harvest and our own lives. We align our will with his so that we no longer desire the life that is satisfying to us, but the life that is obedient and pleasing to God.

As we long to become obedient, we become willing to cross the pain line, we become willing to put others before ourselves, and we become willing to share the reason for the hope that we have in the gospel.

[18 : 24] Therefore, let's obey the call and go. Let's get alongside others. Let's be amongst the harvest, sharing life with them, and let our actions and speech be a glimpse of the God who created us, sustains us, and loves us.

The God filled with compassion. The God that is the good shepherd who laid down his life for us, and ensuring a distinctive love, people will ask the question, why are they different?

And then they will look and see that it's because we know that it was Christ who first loved us. To close, I would like to touch on how this passage influences how we approach the Family Fun Day. We pray for the day so the congregation can go out into the community and share the good news of Jesus. furthermore, as we invite friends and family, we do it boldly because we are doing it with a compassion for our community.

We love them and long to show this in how we serve them on the day, whether it be food, welcoming them, or including them in the games and activities. This compassion leads us to want to know them, know their struggles.

[19 : 41] We want to show how much God rejoices in repentance when those who are lost come back and choose to return God's love to him. We want them to share in the joy that is greater than anything else this world has to offer.

Amen.