

Matthew 9:35–38

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[0 : 00] Matthew 9, 35-38. 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.

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

Therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

Well, of this one thing, I am sure, we have already heard one's voice raised in praise of the gospel, the good news sung through the testifying lips of one who knows him well.

The gospel. The word gospel, good news, was written in the 4th century on papyri, a sheet of paper, as it were, made from the papyrus plant.

[1 : 40] It was written gospel by an Egyptian official to signal the ascension to the throne of Julius Verus Maximus.

Whoever that Egyptian official was, they were gospeling the news, the big news, the good news, according to the one writing it, that one ruler had now succeeded another.

Prior to that, the word gospel or good news was etched not on a papyri plant like piece of paper, but etched in stone, 1st century, on a tablet called the calendar of Priene to celebrate the new kingdom brought into the world by Julius Caesar.

This is an inscription that we have today. You can find it somewhere, I'm supposing, in some museum on the globe. The calendar went so far as to align the provincial calendar with the Roman calendar and bring them together to celebrate the first day of the new year to coincide with the birthday of Julius Caesar.

The claims on this stone tablet are audacious. They're as audacious as Caesar himself. It begins like this.

[3 : 11] Since Providence, which has ordered all things and is deeply interested in our life, has set in most perfect order by giving us Augustus, whom she filled with virtue that he might benefit humankind, sending him as a savior, both for us and for our descendants, that he might end war and arrange all things.

And since he, Caesar, by his appearance, excelled even our aspirations, surpassing all previous benefactors and not even leaving to posterity any hope of surpassing what he has done.

And since his birthday of the god, Augustus, was the beginning of good tidings, gospel, good news, we therefore bring these calendars together.

And so we have it. Not merely on ivory keys in the voice of a contemporary singer, or not merely on papyrus back in the 4th century, but also in stone inscription, the word gospel, deployed on both paper and plant leaf to tell us the good news of regime change.

That's the significance I want to open with today. Gospel is used in the ancient world to signify regime change.

[4 : 45] The good news that a failed empire has given way to a future dynasty. A moment of celebration where you gospel. Good news? They are done and a new one has come.

At the time that Matthew then gives us his gospel, the gospel according to Matthew, he is claiming nothing less for Jesus. The good news of Matthew to the reader today is that in Jesus, the previous rulers of the world have been supplanted.

And the glad tidings are with his coming. Take a look at it. It's right there in your text, nestled in. You might have missed it.

Verse 35, when Jesus went throughout all of the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and affliction.

It's a summary statement for Matthew. He's used the identical sentence back in chapter 4, verse 35, which preceded all of Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, followed by all of his miraculous healings in chapter 8 and 9.

[6 : 07] And so Matthew is saying, I've got good news of the kingdom, and you'll learn about it as you listen to his teaching, and you see it confirmed by his healing.

The gospel. Jesus brings in a new world order. Which means then, that with the arrival of Jesus, we have two kingdoms in conflict.

The kingdoms of this world, and the kingdoms of our Christ, until he settles all of the ensuing material before the end.

Jesus, according to Matthew, is God's forever king. He signaled it right out of the gate, didn't he?

Chapter 1, verse 1, the son of Abraham, the son of David, Abraham, of course, the one to whom all families would be blessed by God, David, of course, that we would have a ruler that lived forever on behalf of God, and that Jesus is that one.

The gospel of Matthew is the gospel of Jesus, son of Abraham, son of David. He now proclaims that gospel. Which means then, you ought to know, and we ought to know, from these verses, what is the nature of this new kingdom?

[7 : 33] I am telling you that Jesus is king of the world in which you live. What is the nature of his kingdom? What are the benefits of having Jesus as your king?

And what does Jesus want from you as you learn to faithfully follow him? What is the nature of the kingdom? Look again, verse 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.

The word gospel, good news, of regime change, the nature of it? Well, it's from heaven. The kingdom of heaven.

The world, which we cannot see up there, has come down here. In Jesus, it then was, for a time, on earth, as it is in heaven.

That with Jesus, there is the in-breaking of God's eternal rule into a world gone wrong, that his order would be known, that his people would be reconciled, that we would taste in his work the complete restoration of all things, even last week, of our bodies.

[9 : 09] This is the nature of the kingdom, that it is what, the subtle tracing of the nature of the kingdom is that which is of heaven has been going on in Matthew from the very beginning.

Remember in chapter 2? What do they say when they arrive from the east? Where is he who is born? What? King of the Jews. That this kingdom, which was promised by God to come through the Jewish line to bless all the families, is, even by their question, subtly now moving toward, where's Jesus?

Chapter 3, John the Baptist. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Chapter 4, Jesus reiterates the very same message. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is here.

When the Sermon on the Mount begins, it opens with, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness, for they will receive the kingdom of heaven.

Chapter 6, he says, Seek first the kingdom, notice, of God. That's Jesus' message. that in him, a new rule, a regime change, has taken place.

[10 : 19] Heaven has come to earth. His rule is exercised through his reconciliation and restoration. And the very kingdom of heaven is nothing less than God has reappeared in the world.

That's the nature of it. No wonder he says in chapter 7, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter into the kingdom because we have two kingdoms in conflict.

Or, chapter 8, while the miracles confirm the message of the kingdom, the message and the messenger, all of these things, the rule of God has now supplanted the rule of the world.

And that's where this begins. Jesus is proclaiming the in-breaking of God's rule in your life.

For Matthew, this was worth gospeling. This was worth celebrating. This was worth writing on stone tablets. This is worth scratching out on paper. This is worth the writing of new songs to herald, to gospel, to proclaim that I'm meeting God and his rule over my life when I encounter Jesus and learn of him.

[11 : 45] That heaven is at hand. That relief has arrived. That the horrific effects of earthly rule, which are evidenced in our world every day, have been reversed with his reign.

That's the nature of the kingdom. What do I have to offer you this morning? Nothing less than heaven itself. Nothing less than peace with God.

Nothing less than hope for your future. This is what Matthew is compelled to herald on the pages of his gospel.

What are the benefits of this? If this is true, since this is true, what are the benefits of having Jesus as your king?

I know there are many ways to implore people to consider becoming a Christian. I could speak of the judgment of God that rests over your head. We could speak of the wrath of God under which we all are.

[12 : 53] We could speak of the sin that is in our lives that we need to repent of. But let me just look at the other side of the coin for a moment from this text. What are the benefits of having Jesus as your king?

Well, they're right there, verses 36 and 37. Let me read it first. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. Benefits? You get a better shepherd than the one you've got now. His rule is better than any earthly ideology, conviction, or commitment that you can put in its place to run your life.

You get a better shepherd for your soul. when he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.

Harassed. Helpless. One of those words actually means ripped apart. That people are walking through the world and they're gutted by the ideologies, the teachings, the proclamations, the ministries of politicians, of artists, of religious teachers.

[14 : 31] They just gut the people. They rip them open. I'm thinking of how that happened for Israel.

It's interesting to me that Isaiah, which launches the ministry of John the Baptist, also speaks in that same chapter of God who would one day come as a better shepherd.

Verse 9 of Isaiah 40, go up on a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news. That's gospel. Lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news.

That's gospel. Lift it up, fear not, say to the cities of Judah, behold your God. Behold the Lord God comes with might, his arm rules for him. He will tend his flock like a shepherd.

He will gather his lambs in his arms. He will carry them in his bosom and gently lead those that are with young. So the prophetic word of Isaiah, which launches the ministry of the Baptist, also indicates that one would come like a shepherd.

[15 : 40] It would be God himself. He's better than the one you're following today. If that, I can guarantee you. Our lives are falling apart around us in this culture because we're listening to the gospel, which would set you free from all things, but enslaves you to almost anything.

You know, in the Old Testament, what happened with the shepherds of Israel was that they began to let people identify the God of their choice. Create your own God, which is then you fashion a God in your own image.

And then you say to the people, now that you've created a God in your own image, you can do what you like without any negative consequence into the God that you've created. And therefore, it wasn't long before Israel was sacrificing their own children to the gods of Molech.

They were ripping apart the actual bodies of their own children. Nothing new for us today. The individuals which are trumpeting your freedom to create the God of your choice and do whatever you would like with your own body are actually destroying the very body that God gave you.

They're actually downgrading the dignity of what it is to be human. And we're falling for it all over the globe.

[17 : 14] And it's tragic. We are being gutted because we're following the shepherds of our own choosing.

What I want to say to you is the benefit of having Jesus as your king is you have one who has compassion for you. True compassion.

See, becoming a Christian isn't coming to terms with the fact that you've got to live under this incredibly stringent God. No, it's actually coming to Jesus where I have the compassion that I actually need.

The word there for compassion is actually, again, gut-wrenching, gut-wrenching, life-altering concern for you. If you come to Jesus, you come to one who literally bleeds for you. You come to one who loves you. You come to one who can care for you. You come to one who will come alongside you, who will tenderly reorder things for you.

[18 : 15] This is a great benefit. And he looks out over the world of his own day, and I look out over mine, and you look out over the same one, and we see it all coming apart at the seams.

It's because we're following shepherds of our own choosing. I think that's probably for me even sufficient reason to become a Christian.

Just that single verse, verse 36, when he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. Oh, don't you want a shepherd who can help you make sense of all the complexity of this life?

There are other benefits. I mean, we opened up on chapter 9 with that healing of the paralytic, and it was a fascinating story of a few weeks ago.

If you weren't with us, a man comes in, he's been a paralytic, Jesus looks at him and he says, my son, your sins are forgiven, to the astonishment of all, and then later he raises him up in body as well.

[19 : 25] But is that not a benefit? Your sins are forgiven? Peace with God, being right with him, not only learning how to make my way in a world that is telling me everything else than what the scriptures are teaching, but actually having forgiveness?

I mean, this goes back to chapter 1, verse 21, when the angel said, you will call his name Jesus because he will forgive the people of their sins. This is the theme of the kingdom.

The kingdom of heaven, God breaking in, has not come into the world to condemn the world, but that through him the world might be saved. Jesus has not come to condemn you, he's come to embrace you.

He's come to actually reconcile us to God. He's come with his own visceral heart feeling for you. What a benefit. Sin's forgiven. A better shepherd. what then would he want from you?

[20 : 39] Let's say that you're sitting here this morning, friend, and you're wondering, all right, if the nature of the kingdom that Matthew is proclaiming is that heaven is broken in, and the person and work of Christ, and if the benefit of those kingdom, his rule, not my own, is that I am reconciled to God, I have my sins forgiven, he will gently come around me and begin to help me make sense of the life I'm living, and he will walk with me, and he will be careful with me, and what does he want from me?

Fascinating, this text anyway, as it tries to answer that particular question, verse 37 and 38, then he said to his disciples, the harvest is plentiful, the laborers are few, therefore pray earnestly! to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. This surprised me. What does he want from his faithful followers?

What does he want if you're going to become a loyal subject? What does he want if you this morning are weighing the conflict of kingdoms and thinking about putting your weight into his, not this, world?

What does he want? First thing he wants is prayer. According to the text, prayer comes first. I would have thought change, a new set of rules to follow.

[22 : 22] I would have thought productivity, get to work. first thing though, he calls us to the privilege of prayer.

You know, I raised, Lisa and I raised five children, and we, I should say I, succumbed to trying to be productive with my life.

That's what God would want from me if I'm going to enter into his kingdom. productivity. I used to tell my kids, and it's probably to my shame now, if you meet them on the street and you talk to them one day, you say, oh, I know why you're that way a little bit.

Your dad told me he messed you up in some respects. I used to say there's two things you need to do in life. At some point, give your life to Christ, and secondly, get something done for him before you have to look him in the eye.

Now, that was a humorous thing, and maybe a helpful thing, but this idea of productivity was just so ingrained in me. I kind of wish that my kids were back little again around me.

[23 : 36] I could say, look, give your life to Christ, and spend time in his presence now. Don't worry so much about what you get done before you look him in the eye.

Be with him now. Go to prayer. It's not just prayer. Notice what it says, earnestly, earnest prayer. If you're wanting to know what God would want from you as a follower of his rule, the first step is he wants you to pray earnestly.

He wants you to prioritize prayer. In some sense, prayer is a bookend that supports and upholds your life work. prayer. It makes sense to me now because prayer is an act of faith.

It's an act of following. What am I supposed to pray for? What are you supposed to pray for?

Evidently, not your own longings. You know, just as a reminder to us, we often invite you to come forward for prayer.

[24 : 56] But what Jesus would say, if you are going to begin following him today, he is not just asking you to come forward for prayer, he is calling you to a life of prayer.

He's calling you to prayer. We come forward for our own longings. He calls us for more laborers. This is interesting to me.

We need to be, if we are going to accomplish anything as Christchurch Chicago, let me implore us on what should be the chief characteristic of our life together.

Here it is. Prayer. Chief characteristic. I know our purpose.

We exist to praise the everlasting riches of God's glorious grace as they're found in Christ. Christ. I know our vision to build up a multi-ethnic and cross-cultural church that proclaims Jesus to everyone and displays the gospel everywhere.

[26 : 02] And I know the prerequisite for any strategy, prayer. I invite you to reorder your life on prayer.

I call you to prioritize prayer. I implore you to make the gathered prayer times of this family to be of preeminent concern for your following.

And interestingly, we're praying here for, he says, laborers, gospel workers. Evidently, the kingdom that Jesus brought into the world and began to proclaim and teach concerning heaven's arrival and it being at hand.

The kingdom which brings reconciliation to God, the kingdom that promises one day full restoration to God, even in your body, is the kingdom that says, now that you're following, begin talking to the Lord of the harvest for more people who would be able to communicate the news that there are two kingdoms in conflict now, one run by Jesus and one run by the ways of the world.

and the church needs to be very clear on what those kingdoms are and what the implications will be. And following Jesus then is to say, Lord, help us raise up more men and women who know the gospel, understand the gospel, want to trumpet the glad tidings of the gospel, who want to tell other people that heaven is at hand, Jesus has come, reconciliation can be had, peace with God is available, a shepherd is tendered, he'll walk with you in the mess, and we'll walk with you too.

[28 : 20] He says, I need more people like that. In fact, that's what's going to happen in chapter 10, we're going to miss it for three weeks, we'll come back to it, but as soon as Jesus offers this prayer, he says, well, let's get some more to get going, and he takes the twelve, and off they go.

I would say to you and to me, the Lord needs to raise up from this place, over the next 50 years, hundreds of men and women who know how to gospel.

the church needs people who will begin to tell others that Jesus has come, that a fresh start with God can be made, that there is a word that competes with the world, and what is it?

Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. There is something about that name.

That's the good news that Christ Church Chicago has. We have nothing else to offer the neighborhood other than the fullness of heaven in the name of my Lord.

[29 : 36] That's better than the arrival of Caesar Augustus. The glad tidings are, that in Jesus a Savior has been born. Come, Jesus says.

Unto me, Jesus says. And I will give you rest, Jesus says. Take my yoke upon you.

My yoke is easy. My burden is light. The one that you're carrying as you listen to the shepherds of the age are undoing the beauty and the glory of what God through Christ can do.

Our heavenly father, as we look together at this gospel according to Matthew, you. I pray that we would know what the gospel is, what its chief benefits are, and what you would have us do.

Lord, make us a people on our knees as this conflict of kingdoms is yet waged in our midst. In Jesus' name we pray.

[31 : 00] Amen.