

The King of Compassion

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[0 : 00] Okay, so, Matthew 9, and let me read verses 35 to 38. Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and illness.

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. So, let's keep Matthew 9 open there, and we're going to explore these words together.

And let me just start by asking, it's a slightly unusual question. I wonder how you are with crowds or with people? We live here in the north of Cambridge.

Cambridge is a big city, going to the centre of town, just on King Street, not King Street, outside one of the colleges. On a Saturday or any day, you'll see hordes of people.

[1 : 07] You'll push past them, they'll elbow past you. We live in a city of thousands and thousands of people. I wonder what you think about people, whether you like them or don't like them.

Hard to get any pictures of people in Orchard Park, but you can see that with the light. That's an aerial view of Orchard Park. There's a circus drive in the middle. Here's the school where we live. There's, what, 3,000 people in Orchard Park or something like that. A lot of the time, they're behind closed doors. You sometimes bump into people at the Tescos on Unwind Square. But how do you view people?

Do you like people? Or do you see the people around you as a kind of, oh, they're getting in my way. They're in the queue in front of me.

How frustrating. And you don't make eye contact with them. Let me ask with an extra twist. Say you're a follower of Jesus. Say you're a Christian.

[2 : 07] And when you look around North Cambridge or the centre of town on a mass of people who don't believe in or follow God, maybe the majority of people in Cambridge, what do you see?

Do you see fellow men and women, friends, people you love, a world to get involved in? Or do you see the opposition? You're suspicious and distant.

You've got to keep away. Do you think it matters how you see other people? Do you think it matters how you see the crowd of people in town on a Saturday afternoon?

Well, I ask that question because we're in the end of Matthew chapter 9 this morning, at the end of a couple of months in Matthew chapters 8 and 9. Since chapter 4 and the start of his public ministry, Jesus has been sweeping through the cities and the villages of Galilee with his message that the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

He teaches people and they're in awe. In Matthew 8 and 9 through this past couple of months, he heals people, he drives out demons, he calms a storm, he gives a glimpse of what the kingdom one day will be.

[3 : 19] Jesus is like the opposite of a tornado. Instead of a trail of destruction and damage behind him, were you to look around in Galilee, you'd see behind Jesus restoration and life and joy.

As Jesus comes into the world, he rattles people's cages. Some people love him. In chapter 9, verse 33, the crowds marvel and say, never seen anything like this in Israel.

But at the same time, the Pharisees say, he casts out demons by the prince of demons. But still Jesus carries on. And in these few verses at the end of chapter 9, we are given a Jesus-eye view of the world.

Actually, more than that, a Jesus-eye view of people, of the crowds gathered before him. My sister Katie and I, we used to have strange conversations.

She was the strange one, not me. And she used to say that when she died, she'd be happy to have her body used for medicine for the good of other people. But she said she didn't want anyone to have her eyes because she didn't want anyone else seeing what she sees.

[4 : 34] Here in these verses, it is the opposite. So Matthew here invites us to see what Jesus sees and to see what Jesus feels as he looks out on humanity and on us.

Do you think it matters how you see people? Okay, three things from these verses for us here at Orchard Park this morning. What Jesus saw, what Jesus felt, what Jesus commanded. Here's the first thing in these verses. What Jesus saw, he saw harassed, helpless sheep. Let me read again, verses 35-36.

As 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 on them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.

Being sheep without a shepherd in the Bible, it means life without the loving leadership of God. So when Moses, in Numbers 27, he's going to retire from leading the people, he says, who will, verse 17, go out and come in before them?

[5 : 54] One who will lead them out and bring them in, so that the Lord's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd. In Ezekiel 34, God judges and condemns the leaders of Israel for neglecting the people.

He says, When God's leaders are absent, or when you stand by yourself outside the care and the rule of the one who made you, you are like sheep without a shepherd.

That is such a vivid image. Because the thing is, sheep without a shepherd are in deep trouble. I was brought up in the countryside, in the Cotswolds, where there are lots of sheep.

I don't know much about sheep, but I've seen a lot of sheep in my time. And the thing about sheep is, they are not set up for defence. They're not fearsome creatures.

Okay, a quick sheep lesson you could probably add to this. A sheep's teeth are not sharp, they are blunt for chewing. A sheep is built for comfort and providing warm jumpers.

[7 : 11] They are not quick. And, to put it politely, so as not to offend, the sheep is not the sharpest animal in the farmyard. So a sheep does not have much strength, a sheep is not very quick, and a sheep does not have much brains to defend himself.

I have not seen this, but if you've ever come across in the countryside, the aftermath of a dog or a wild animal getting in amongst a herd of sheep, it is horrible.

It is a brutal mismatch. Here is a not too scary picture of some sheep, if you can see them. Not those ones, but these ones.

This sheep on the left here, who is missing a leg, and this sheep who's had its ear bitten. See, sheep without a shepherd, our verse says, are harassed and helpless.

And harassed is kind of like flayed or skinned. So you can imagine it, it's a bit horrible. You think of torn and bloody ears and bite marks on the neck and the side. And each time the sheep tries to get away, the dog claws at it again.

[8 : 28] They're ripped to shreds. The word helpless is thrown down or scattered. So imagine the wild animal piling into the flock and sheep get thrown in all directions, desperate to limp away, but they're helpless and isolated.

By themselves, sheep are at the mercy of every attacker. And the only hope for a sheep is a shepherd, and without one you are lost. That's what Jesus is saying here.

And you think, what's that got to do with us and the people of Cambridge? Because our skin is moisturised, not flayed, and some of us are relatively strong, and most of us would beat your average sheep in a maths test.

But the point is, without God, without God's appointed shepherd, we are defenceless. And that is what Jesus sees as he surveys Cambridge.

He sees sheep. Who are harassed and helpless. It's not possible for us to put Jesus' eyeballs in ours and see, but it's a bit like, you know, imagine if you put a different pair of glasses on and they're tinted and you sort of see things differently.

[9 : 48] What we're meant to do here through Matthew's Gospel is put Jesus' glasses on or know what Jesus himself sees and know that this is true.

What does this mean? What does it mean that the people of Cambridge and you and I are a bit like sheep without a shepherd? Because actually you can be a pretty casual believer in God.

You could shove God to the edges of your life. You could have nothing to do with him whatsoever and more than survive, can you not? Well, the answer is you can't.

Chapters eight and nine, what we've been doing as a church over this past couple of months, confront us with what it is that will harass us against which we have no defence.

Do you remember this stuff? In chapter eight, there's a man with leprosy, infectious skin, leaving him excluded. He's the walking dead. There's a servant lying paralysed at home, suffering terribly, helpless.

[10:54] Peter's mother-in-law is sick with a fever at the point of death. There's a disciple in the first stages of grief, desperate to go and bury his father. There are men possessed by demons out of their minds.

There's a woman with 12 years of bloody discharge. There's a ruler whose daughter has just died in front of him. Two chapters full of harassed, helpless humanity.

Because that is the truth of how life is. We're human beings. We're made in the image of God. And yet all of us in and of ourselves have turned from him in disobedience, in sin.

And as a result, God has given over our world and us to evil and sickness and suffering.

And ultimately, we will die. And ultimately, we will die. Because the wages of sin is death. And that is what Jesus sees here 2,000 years ago, as he looks out on the crowds.

[12:08] And it is what he sees as he looks out on us and on Cambridge. He sees individuals, families, cities, in a world that's turned its back on God, tormented by the evil and sickness and weakness that ends up in only one place.

Death. And the point is, to be really blunt, that in the face of my coming death, however big and strong and sophisticated and in control I pretend to be, without a shepherd, I am in fact defenceless.

I'm not fast enough to run away. Death will have me. And how desperate it is to walk that path alone with no shepherd.

So I just want to pause and ask this morning, kind of does this make sense for us? For the crowds out there, but also for ourselves.

If you can, look through Jesus' eyes, put Jesus' glasses on as I'm looking at you, and think about yourself and us. This is true of us, right?

[13:20] However strong we feel, that we sin, that so many of us suffer so terribly, and that the day is coming when we will die under the judgment of God.

I think it's such a scary thing for so many people. It's why people pretend as though suffering and death is just something for other people.

We try to push it away. Probably why in our world we slap on the age-defying lotions, or try to dress young and feel young, or try to hide away the fact that our bodies are ageing.

It's probably why we push the elderly to one side. It's probably why we worship doctors so much. It's probably why we're so frantically busy, got to keep going and achieve, and do something with my days and do it now.

And it's not just that as a world under the surface we're scared. I think we're scared because we are absolutely helpless in the face of the suffering and death that will come to us.

[14:28] So point one, what Jesus saw, what Jesus sees as he looks out on the world.

He sees harassed, helpless sheep. Is that what you see? Three things this morning. What Jesus saw.

Secondly, wonderfully now, what Jesus felt. Because as Jesus looks out on a world like ours, Jesus feels deep compassion.

Look at this in the verse with me. It's so wonderful. Verse 36 again. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.

Do you see how Jesus doesn't respond to the crowds? He's not like a superior Christian. I'm safe.

I've got eternal life with the good shepherd and those people are in trouble and rightly so.

[15:31] They've rejected God. I don't go near them. He is not like that. Compassion. Such a strong word that. It's to do with your innards and your bowels where you are moved deep inside yourself.

It's a gut-wrenching response of pity to those in front of you. And it says here that that is what wells up in Jesus Christ as he looks out on a dying world.

You might be new to Christian things this morning. Let me ask. Did you know that that is what Jesus is like? It's all through the Gospels. He cares for the leper.

He identifies with the despised and the outcast and the lonely. He's gentle with people who are bruised. He doesn't get compassion fatigue. You know we're like that?

I try to be kind to people around me who are in trouble for a while but then I get tired. Jesus is tireless in his love for those in need.

[16 : 35] The final days of his life, the nation of Israel turns against him more and more. He doesn't change. Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets. How often would I have gathered your children together?

At the point of his murder, as he hangs on the cross, he prays, Father forgive them for they do not know what they do. He sees us and he feels compassion.

So important. You know, you don't have to be a sort of clever university type person. The centre of Cambridge is a place for lots of clever discussion, if you like.

At Hills Road Sixth Form, or in Adult Life, you can work out your own philosophy of life, you can dabble in a bit of thinking and philosophy, you can come to a conclusion about God.

Is he there or is he not? It's mildly interesting. Until you come face to face with suffering and death. Like the cold fact about atheism, pretending there is no God, is that if there is no creator, then when the people you love are near to death, there is no help at all.

[17 : 49] There's just nothing. But this verse says that that kind of vision is not true. It says that at the heart of the universe is the man Jesus Christ, whose guts are moved with care and pity.

So moved in the face of our suffering and death, the wages of sin. And this is the glory of the gospel, that he lays down his life for us.

That is the shepherd I need. He allows his own defences to fall. He spreads his arms.

He bears our sins. He gives himself up. He dies in our place. And in so doing, he defeats death for good.

To those who are harassed and helpless without a shepherd, the Lord Jesus is the good shepherd. He is the shepherd. Just let me ask simply, do we know him as our shepherd?

[18 : 59] That is, do you sense how desperately helpless you are without him? And have you come to find shelter with him? It may be this morning that some of us know really very sharply our need for his care.

It might be that the experiences of the past month or six months have battered us. There are things we've done we are so guilty of we need forgiveness. There are ways in which we have been hurt physically.

There are ways in which our bodies are breaking down. There are those whom we love, even we ourselves, who are thinking about our own deaths. you know, there is no safe place apart from with him.

And this verse says, he is moved deep inside himself as he sees you harassed and helpless. And when you come to him, which is what people do in Matthew 8 and 9, when you come and say, Jesus have mercy on me, he will do.

And in his time, he will bind you up. He will grip your hand strongly and suffering and death will not have the final word in your life. And even as you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you will not go alone without a shepherd.

[20 : 23] So wonderful. Because Jesus is compassionate. Three things this morning. Matthew 9, 35 to 36, 38.

A Jesus-eye view of crowds and people. What Jesus saw, he saw harassed, helpless sheep in the face of death. What Jesus felt, he felt gut-wrenching compassion that drove him to the cross.

Finally, what do we do if we get that? If I can see what Jesus sees and just feel an inkling of what Jesus feels, what should I do?

Finally, briefly, point three, what Jesus commanded. He commanded us to ask the Lord to send out workers.

Verses 36 to 38. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. And then he said to his disciples, do you see this?

[21 : 27] 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. When I stop seeing people out there as inconveniences to my life or bad people I should stay away from, when I start to see a harvest of human beings who are harassed and helpless, when I start to feel even just a tiny spark of what Jesus feels, what must I do?

Verse 38. Pray earnestly to the Lord. That is, we're meant to beg him by ourselves in our bedroom or with our families around the table this week.

Lord, send people into the harvest field. That's what Jesus commands here. Pray for tens and hundreds and thousands of laborers who will throw themselves into their schools and neighborhoods and workplaces and Orchard Park and London and Canada and Pakistan.

People who will go and serve and do good and more than that will stand up and say to people facing death, there is good news, there is a good shepherd and he is for you.

Would we pray that? Would we pray that for the good of the world? Here's the thing though, final thing to say. As we would pray something like that, could it be that the answer comes back, you're a laborer, it's you.

[23 : 11] You. Go to CRC and your school and your workplace and your neighborhood and you go and live and serve and speak with the compassion of Jesus Christ to people who are dying in their sins.

What Jesus saw, what Jesus felt, what Jesus commanded. Will we have a Jesus-eye view of the world and having come to him will we do what he says.

Well, I think what we're going to do is we're going to sing not straight away but that's the most important thing that we have