The Power of Many

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[0:00] Well, if you would take your Bibles and open to page 9 in the second section in the New Testament to Matthew chapter 9, we're going to look at that brief, that little passage, verses 35 to the beginning of chapter 10, verse 1.

As you look that up, I wonder if you've ever asked the question, what does Jesus think of Vancouver? I don't mean the city and the mountains, he made it, he likes it.
I mean, what does Jesus make of the population, who we are, how we live, how we relate to him and how we relate to each other? This month's Vancouver magazine ran an article called Spirit of the West.
And it investigated some of the current patterns of spirituality and faith and practice in Vancouver. It's a very interesting and sympathetic article in some ways. And it outlines a number of exotic religious choices that are on the smorgasbord for us as we live in Vancouver.
And the writer describes how his parents were part of the landslide in Canada of the last generation out of the church. And he points out that between 1945 and 1975, weekly Christian church attendance in Canada dropped from 60% to 30%.
[1:30] And then by the turn of the millennium, it was down to 20%. And of course, we here on the West Coast, we break all the records. BC is the only province in Canada when the census is taken, and there's a box on the census for no religion.

They're called religious nuns, not N-U-N, but N-O-N-E. BC has the highest percentage in the census of religious nuns.
35% as against those godly provinces, Alberta and Ontario, that have 23 and 16 respectively. Very interesting. And Vancouver, the response for no religion is 39%.
And the writer of the column says, it's an interesting conclusion, we live in the most godly city in Canada. I wonder what Jesus thinks of Vancouver.
And we want to ask two questions of this passage today. What does Jesus feel and what does Jesus do? And it's a brilliant passage. It's a pivot. It's like a hinge. It looks back to the first nine chapters to what Jesus has been doing.
[2:43] And it now looks forward and tells us what he feels and what he does in response to the crowds. Just look at the first verse, verse 35. This is a summary of the first nine chapters.

Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity. It's a wonderful, it's a beautiful summary.
It says Jesus does two things. He preaches and teaches the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven and heals people. And if you go back through the nine chapters, you go through any of the gospels, and you draw two columns.
And in the first column you put those things Jesus is asked to do and he responds. And those things that Jesus initiates, in the first column are all the healings, with one or two exceptions, and in the second column is his preaching and teaching.
Because the healings are a sign of the kingdom, but his preaching and teaching is the way we enter the kingdom. And the kingdom of heaven, if you're new at Christianity, this is a way that Jesus, his favourite way of speaking about, the salvation that he has come to bring, because he is God's king.
[3:59] And he has come to gather people together around himself, under his rule and his blessing, to be in his place, to live a different life, to belong to the kingdom of heaven. That's why the gospels are full of the kingdom of heaven.

He bursts on the scene and he says, the kingdom of heaven is, it's now come, repent and believe the kingdom. He says, blessed are the poor in spirit, yours is the kingdom of heaven.

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Seek first the kingdom and its righteousness. Pray, thy kingdom come. So this is the summary of Jesus' ministry.
This is his great concern. And it's a summary in one way of the whole Bible. It's a summary of God's work from creation to new creation. He is bringing people under the lordship of Jesus Christ.
That's what this world is about in a way. So let's ask these two questions then. Alright, good. We've all got that. How does Jesus feel and what does he do?
[5:00] How does he feel? Well, we're given a picture of how he feels in verse 36. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.

You know, there's a number of Greek words we translate by the word compassion. This is by far the most powerful and the most visceral. It's not a polite word.
It comes from the word for bowels. And it's deep, gut-wrenching pain. In other words, it's not a tiny, temporary feeling of mercy.
You know, it's not throwing $20 at a charity to make yourself feel better. This is deep, painful emotion. Literally, gut-wrenching. Jesus looks at the crowds, at those who do not yet follow him, who have not come to the good shepherd, who are not yet part of the kingdom.
He experiences a profound spiritual pain. And he looks at the crowd around him and we know from the gospels there are rich and poor, favoured and those who are despised.
[6:14] And he says they are harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. And these words are very strong words. The word harassed is from the word to skin an animal.

And the word helpless is to take something and throw it down and to hold it down or even just to throw it away. They're graphic and painful pictures of who Jesus sees, of how Jesus sees all those people who are outside his rule, all the sheep who've not responded to the voice of the good shepherd.
And we've spoken about this before, haven't we? Sheep are amazing animals and a brilliant picture God gives us. Sheep uniquely combine defencelessness and stupidity.
You know, some years ago when the Sunday school was working through this issue, one of the young kids said, I'm offended being called a sheep. And I think she was the only person that Sunday that really understood.
Goats, pretty able to defend themselves. Sheep have no strategic self-defensive ability. You put them in a fold, they wander away stupidly, they fall over, they damage themselves, they even have been known to move towards those things which torment them.
[7:37] The very thing that attacks them, they wander up to them. Unless they have a shepherd who gathers them and binds them up and brings them home. And this is how Jesus views those who are spiritually lost.

To live a life apart from Jesus Christ, outside the kingdom of God. And Jesus is painfully passionate about this and he tells his disciples because he wants the disciples to feel something of that pain.
The compassion and tenderness of Jesus to us is because he sees what others don't see. He sees past all the external things, the confidence and the pretense that we have of having it all together.
And he sees people as desperate sheep who have gone astray, who are weak, who are harassed and have cuts on them, helpless and who are held down and unable to help themselves in such spiritual danger that unless someone takes action, they will die.
And the wonderful thing about this compassion is that it always leads to action. I mean, this is what leads Jesus to go into Jerusalem on the donkey on that first Palm Sunday.
[8:47] It's what leads him to offer up his life on the cross as a ransom for us. We have different kind of compassion. We have a compassion we're able to turn off and to turn on like a television remote.

We are more exposed to the terrible suffering of people in this world than any generation has ever been through the television. Some of the social scientists now say we have compassion fatigue.
And you can turn your television on and you can watch a world vision presentation of the victims of violence and be deeply moved. Or you can flick the channel and see a program where violence becomes the center and core of the entertainment.
Then we flick the television off and we go and sleep in our comfortable beds and wonder how we'll be entertained tomorrow. But Jesus' compassion is different. It's not something that turns on and off.

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It's something he feels very deeply and very painfully and it impels him to act. So the answer to the first question is what does Jesus feel? He feels deep, painful, passionate compassion.
[9:57] Well then what does he do? You would expect Jesus to take some dramatic action wouldn't you? I mean shouldn't he go out and conscript a great and mighty army and give them a great and mighty plan to make all these under shepherds to reach out for the kingdom.

Well he doesn't. At least he doesn't do that first. It's true if you look down to chapter 10 verse 1 and 10 verse 5 he does call the 12 and send them out on mission.
But what he does first is he doesn't organize and he doesn't strategize and he doesn't advertise. What does he do? He calls his disciples to pray. Look at verse 37.
This follows hard on the compassion of 36. Then he said to his disciples the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few pray therefore that the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. This is a word to all disciples and Jesus wants all his disciples to feel something of his compassion and the most certain and first mark that we have genuinely felt Jesus' compassion is that we pray.
[11:20] and I think Jesus uses this very startling image of the harvest again to shock us. The harvest in Matthew's gospel is always the judgment.

At the close of the age when Jesus comes again he says with his angels it's like a great harvest and the angels will reap the harvest and bring them in and he will judge the living and the dead. And as Jesus looks at the world he says it is ripe for harvest.
Everywhere he looks he sees us doing things that deserve his judgment and the only reason that the judgment has not come is because God is giving time for people to come into this wonderful kingdom.
But here is the problem the harvest is vast but the workers are few in fact the workers are one right now because Jesus is the only one doing it. So what does Jesus call us to do?
He says pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into the harvest. In other words before the reapers come and bring in the harvest Jesus wants us to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers to bring people back into the kingdom.
[12:30] I don't think you can get around the fact that this is critical and urgent and that before anyone is sent out he wants us to pray. Why?

Well I think it's very simple it's because it's the Lord's harvest it's not ours. It's because the world belongs to him and every single person belongs to him and his heart breaks for every person who's wandered away from him.
It reveals his compassion to us and I think the first sign that we've begun to see like Jesus sees or to feel like Jesus feels is that we pray.
We cannot manipulate people into the kingdom we cannot work people into the kingdom we can't even send people it's God who sends and the first thing we need to do is to bow ourselves before the Lord of heaven and earth and ask him to take some of the mercy that he has given to us and extend it to other people as well.
There's nothing cool and calm and calculating about this passage. In fact the word in verse 38 pray is not the normal word it is the word to beg.
[13:47] It's so urgent and the sheep are in such need and Jesus heart has stirred with such love he calls us to pray to beg God. This ought to be part of your private personal daily prayers.

It's much easier to organise and to be active but we must pray. I'm very grateful to those who gather once a month with others at St. John's to pray for God's concerns and we all know we need to pray and we all know we're told to pray and in our hearts we all want to pray and we all struggle to pray. There is nobody I know I met a lot of Christians who says prayer is easy or who are happy with their prayers and that's why it's important for us to set aside time as a congregation in small groups and in our Bible study groups to pray the Lord of the harvest.
This is very important. If you comb through the Gospels and ask the question what does Jesus tell us to pray for there are only two answers. He gives us the Lord's prayer and he gives us this. They're not unimportant concerns to him. Before the twelve go out, before he sends them out, he calls on his disciples to get involved in the work of harvest in a very simple and a very personal way.
[15:10] It is to pray because you see in our prayers that's where we're revealed. If you want to know what's really on my heart, what I really want and like and love, listen to my prayers. Jesus says, when we become members of the kingdom of heaven, we begin to see as Jesus sees and we begin to feel as he feels and the certain mark that has begun to happen is you pray that God would

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raise up workers to send into the harvest.

Christ. Now, you know we have meetings coming up in May where the kingdom of heaven will be proclaimed but the work of that week, what's really important are not the organising and not even the meetings themselves.
The really important thing is that we pray in small groups, in families, on our own. This week I went to visit a pastor of a local congregation down the road here, a small church building, a new church building and he said, we have been praying for you at St.
John's in our leadership for some time now and if you're kicked out of your building we want to make our building available to you. I was very encouraged to see that.
My mind dreaded ten services on Sunday because you see it's a mighty, mighty encouragement. that many are praying for us and I get this message daily because you see if people are praying for us it's not our plans that are going to move forward, it's God's plans that are going to move forward.
[16:43] Charles Spurgeon, the wonderful Baptist preacher in England 110, 20 years ago had a vision. He was not given to visions as Baptists tend not to be.

We Anglicans are of course. And he in a remarkable ministry, a young man, the church sat I think 3,000, it was standing room only Sunday by Sunday and an angel came to him in his sleep and said I'm going to show you where this comes from and it took him to his church when he was preaching and the angel said it's not in the pulpit and he went through and passed the elders and the deacons, it's not in the leadership, through the congregation and there was an elderly woman sitting on the step at the back praying and the angel said this is where it's coming from.
Now we have prayer cards to just help us and remind us about this. These are available at all the exits. We've had them there for about a month. They're just little tiny stimulus to pray for our friends and to pray the prayers that Jesus has taught us.
Take it and put it on your cell phone or put it on your fridge or put it where you shave because it's as we pray to the Lord of the harvest both for the growth of the gospel and the kingdom and for God to send out labourers.
If we do that we are personally involved in promoting the gospel, personally seeking the salvation of others. It's interesting you read through the rest of the New Testament and the letters of the Apostle Paul.
[18:14] Lots of things he commands the New Testament churches. Lots of ways he says you can be involved in promoting the gospel, giving money, fellowship, suffering, preaching, whatever. The one thing he most frequently urges the church is to do, surprise, surprise, is to pray.

Ephesians pray at all times in the spirit and he says pray for me that utterance might be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel.
Thessalonians pray for us brothers and sisters that the word of the Lord may speed on and triumph.
Colossians continue steadfastly in prayer being watchful with thanksgiving and pray for me also for God may open a door for the word to declare the mystery of Christ.
God works salvation through our prayers. The kingdom of God grows and people are brought to the kingdom by our prayers.
And we can have missions and fabulously successful events and brilliantly gifted speakers come in but without prayer it's useless. Prayer for our friends and for those who don't believe I'm saying that this passage is saying is the first sign of the compassion of Jesus.
[19:34] So what does Jesus think of Vancouver? How does he view our city? Well I think he probably says they're harassed, you're harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.

It's very interesting in the article in the Vancouver magazine the writer points out that although we in this city have the highest percentage of religious nuns over 40% of people in that category believe in a God and believe in a God that cares for them and 35% of people in that category admit that they pray in private.
Isn't that stunning? So as Jesus looks at our city being filled with sheep without a shepherd harassed and helpless thrown down bearing scars he is moved with compassion he's moved with compassion not it's not anger it's not those who hate him and mock him and ignore him he's holding back his judgment out of compassion to bring people in and Jesus takes a painful and a passionate view of our city and he calls on us to take the same view very inconvenient spiritually I think and the first thing he does is he places us between him and the city and he calls on us to pray because mission springs from the heart of God and from the compassion of Jesus and we like to think of

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ourselves as compassionate people but the real test of whether we've got Jesus compassion whether we've come to understand him as the good shepherd whether we've begun to feel that deep and painful compassion of his heart is not being extroverted is not having winning charm is not being able to say beautifully crafted prayers it's simply whether we pray so let's do that shall we teaspoon 2016
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