

See as Christ sees

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Date: 14 October 2018

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[0 : 0 0] Would you reach out and take a Bible or share one with someone next to you and turn to the passage Ginzi just read for us at the end of Matthew 9. We're in a series of Matthew's gospel and we come to this wonderful little section, these last three verses of 9 on page 814. And as you're turning it up, I just want to say thank you for all your kindness. The doctors told me this week I can weight bear on my broken foot, which is, it's just as well because it's become very tiring for me asking Bronwyn to bring me my tea and the remote control at the same time.

So the passage, this passage asks us two questions. The first is, what does Jesus feel about Vancouver? How does he see Vancouver? And the second is, what does he want us to do about it? And I so much want you to meet Jesus here in this passage because it takes us right into what he is thinking and feeling. And it's a wonderful, I mean, the thing about it, one of the things that makes it so wonderful is what it follows. Do you remember at the end of last week, as Jesus finished two chapters of miracles, the most astonishing miracles, the religious establishment just say, well, they put it all down to the work of Satan. You see that at the end of verse 34?

All these acts of kindness and power, healing the sick, curing the blind, casting out demons, raising the dead, touching the leper, healing the woman. The crowd loves it, but they don't see who Jesus is and they don't see why he has come and they don't put their faith in Jesus as God's Messiah. And the religious leaders in verse 34, even though they can't deny what Jesus is doing, in fact, they say he's done it, but they put it down to the work of Satan. And it's very distressing.

[2 : 0 2] It's a second, that's the second baby that's been taken out this morning. I think this is a lovely passage.

So now, if you were Jesus and the other religious authorities have just put down, just told now, you're doing it by the power of Satan, what would be your response? Disappointment? Anger? Well, here is the one who can raise the dead and his response is compassion. His heart goes out to them in love. And the word compassion is deep, visceral concern and love.

And it brings us into these last three verses in chapter 9, which is like a transition passage from Jesus doing all these amazing miracles to him handing over the mission to the 12 in chapter 10, verse 1. And Jesus will not be thrown off by lack of faith or by hostility.

And so for the second time in the gospel, verse 36 is almost a mirror of chapter 4, verse 23. Matthew repeats that Jesus goes throughout all the cities and all the villages teaching and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing everyone.

[3 : 1 7] Despite being written off as a tool of Satan, Jesus is still convinced that people need him. And they still need to hear the gospel. And so he teaches the gospel because that's how people have access to the kingdom of heaven. And he gathers people to himself. And as he gathers people to himself, they come with all these needs and sicknesses. And he deals with them as well, demonstrating what kind of kingdom he is bringing, demonstrating what it's going to be like in the new creation. It's going to be very good. And then we're told two things. We're told how Jesus feels about this crowd.

And secondly, what he wants his followers to do. So first, just two points. Number one, how does Jesus feel? What is his heart attitude? Verse 36. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. He looks out at the crowd, educated, uneducated, poor, not so poor, religious and sinners. And what does he see? He sees people as sheep without a shepherd, harassed and helpless.

And his heart wells up with love and compassion toward them. And this idea of sheep and shepherd is a very familiar Bible idea of the relationship between God and us. He is the shepherd and we are the sheep. And every time I come across in the Bible, I talk about the fact that it's not a

complimentary picture. And every time I preach on this, someone tells me a new story demonstrating sheep's stupidity. Will Johnson told me a couple of weeks ago that he was in Scotland on one of the islands as a young man, he was walking along a road and a sheep came racing past him, running as fast as it could and ran straight into a wooden post, knocking its head and killed itself.

Jesus looks at people as sheep without a shepherd, harassed, whacked around and helpless, pushed down, laid out flat, stressed and oppressed. And he has compassion.

And I think we need to realize that the picture of shepherd and sheep is more about God's love and care than it is about our silliness. And those of you who've been Christians for a while will well know this psalm, the beautiful psalm 23, which is a meditation on the wonder of what it is to be able to say, the Lord is my shepherd. The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in righteous paths.

[6 : 09] I have his protection, his guidance. I have his presence with me, his care even now. And when I face death, even though I go through the valley of the shadow of death, I need fear no evil because you are with me.

Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. And having, being able to say the Lord is my shepherd means surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. But it's almost too good to believe. And Jesus comes along in John's gospel and says, I am the good shepherd and I love my sheep so much I lay down my life for them. But here Jesus wants us to consider what can we say about people that don't have the Lord as their shepherd? We have to say they shall want. They are not, he does not let make them lie down in green pastures. He does not restore their soul. He doesn't lead them beside still waters. He doesn't lead them in paths of righteousness. They are directionless. They are without a shepherd. And in death they're on their own. And they know nothing of the goodness and mercy and they shall not dwell in the house of the Lord forever. And here's the question, what attitude should I take to people like that?

What attitude should you take? Jesus' attitude is compassion. It's the strongest possible word. It's the word for guts, gut-wrenching, pain. It's a word only ever used of Jesus in the gospels and only ever used when Jesus is looking at our spiritual need. And it's what he continues to feel toward the sheep without a shepherd from heaven. And I wonder if this is the way you feel. I mean as you go through a week and you see children going to school, do you see people in a home or you see people at the gym? Do you see them with the eyes of Jesus as sheep without a shepherd? Without his guidance and without his presence and without his direction, without the knowledge of his love and his saving, without a hope in death, without really knowing or experiencing goodness and mercy every day of their life? I mean Jesus sees past all that stuff. He sees past the confidence and having it all together. And he sees that we are sheep in great peril and spiritual need and that without him people will die. And so he has compassion. Now I know compassion is a very popular word on the west coast today.

In fact there is, people talk about, social scientists talk about compassion fatigue because almost every time we touch a screen we see something we're called to be compassionate about. A Friday night I went with my sons to watch the movie The Sisters Brothers. Don't go and see it. It's very violent unless you've read the book.

[9 : 00] And there might be 40 people shot to death in the first hour of that movie. But it was only when the horse died that people in the audience gave an audible response of distress. Oh.

I think much of what's currently passes for compassion is built on the view that what people really need is to be well fed, well housed, have successful, well adjusted children and some spare money. And that's good as far as it goes. But Jesus is saying it doesn't go far enough. What so deeply distresses Jesus is that people don't have him.

It's not so much that they're generally needy or sick or unhappy, although he is concerned about all those things. It's specifically that they don't have him as their shepherd. They're not personally connected to him as their king. They don't know Jesus as savior. They haven't experienced what it is to belong to the kingdom of heaven. And it is this compassion that drove Jesus out of heaven.

He loved us and he gave himself for us. And he looks at people and he still looks at people with compassion. A sheep without a shepherd. So as you think about Vancouver, just think about Vancouver for a moment. Or just the people you're in contact with this week. You know, the people

in the gym or in class or in family, friends and neighbours. Ask yourself, do you feel the same way Jesus feels about them? Do you see people as Jesus does? A sheep without a shepherd? I think we need to ask God to help us with this. To give us his heart and to give us his eyes. That's the first thing this passage gives us. To see what Jesus sees. The second is, what does he want us to do? [10:57] Well, what would you expect him to say? You know, if his heart is wrenched by compassion, what is he going to call on his followers to do? Here is Jesus who stilled the storm and raised the dead and healed the sick and cast out demons. Surely he has a big plan that's going to work, right? Verse 37.

He doesn't call us to organise or strategise or advertise. He says, verse 37, to his disciples, the harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into the harvest. Jesus wants all of us, all his followers, to feel the same compassion that he feels. But the first mark of true Christ-like compassion is prayer.

This is not just for the 12. They haven't even been called yet. It's for all disciples who follow Jesus. And Jesus takes this idea of the harvest and turns it on its head. But the idea of the harvest has always been used in the scripture of the judgment, the last day, when God will send out his angels. And he'll gather people when there's no more opportunity to turn to faith in Christ, and they'll face the final judgment. But Jesus uses this picture in a completely different direction.

He says, look around. People are ripe and ready to hear the gospel. He's using harvest as a picture of bringing people into the kingdom of heaven. He says, it's a possibility that there are sheep who will come to the shepherd. That's what the harvest is, of his compassion working salvation.

[12:38] Jesus sees a readiness in many people who are harassed and helpless to come to him as the good shepherd and be saved and have rest. But he says there's a problem. The harvest is plentiful, very vast, but the labour is a few. The harvest is always plentiful. The labour is always few.

In fact, here in chapter 9, the labour is just one. Just Jesus. He's doing it all on his own right now.

And in chapter 10, he commissions the disciples to join him. But before he does that, he commands, very strong command here, he commands us to pray.

And there's nothing cool and attached and unemotional about this. It's not the usual word for prayer. It's the word to beg. It's the word to plead to the Lord of the harvest.

It's not the quiet, devotional prayer. It's the kind of thing that happens when everything else unimportant flows away. And this is the one thing that we are claiming for one thing we want from God.

But Jesus uses it because it's so urgent and the sheep are in such need and he loves us. He's so stirred by love that he calls us to beg God to send out workers into the harvest.

[13:59] Now, why does he call on us to pray? I can think of three reasons here. I think the first reason is the prayer is the first demonstration of real compassion.

You know, if you pray for someone, it's the most compassionate thing you can do for them. So our compassion for Vancouver does not grow as we look more deeply at Vancouver.

It comes as we pray more deeply and get to know the Lord Jesus Christ. And if you don't feel this compassion and if you don't see people in their need of Jesus Christ, or like sheep without a shepherd, this is the place to begin.

Pray that God would give you this heart. But there's a second reason I think he calls on us to pray because it changes us. The harvest, you see, doesn't belong to us. It belongs to the Lord.

It's his harvest. And there's nothing that we can do to make anything effective in the harvest. We don't have any power apart from him in this. It's his world. He owns every person. They're rightfully his.

[15:02] His heart breaks for those who have wandered away from him. And he reveals his compassion in the person of Jesus Christ, calls us to pray. But we are completely dependent upon God for anything to happen in the harvest.

We can't manipulate or work anyone into the kingdom of heaven. You know, we can't even send people rightly into the harvest. It's God who sends them. And since this is an extension of Jesus' compassion, it has to be done in his way.

And that's why it begins with prayer. But thirdly, I think Jesus knows that when we begin to pray for something, it's going to change us.

Or put it this way, when we pray for something, we'll soon become the answer to our prayers. What do I mean? Well, you know, we've just prayed. We prayed the Lord's Prayer a few minutes ago.

And when you pray the prayer, let me take one phrase, thy will be done.

You can't pray thy will be done without thinking about how I'm going to do God's will. And to be more committed to the doing of God's will in your own life. If you're not thinking that, don't pray it.

[16:10] So if we begin to pray that God would send laborers out into the harvest, we're asking God to raise up people who have his heart, who are willing to do what they can do to draw and invite and promote the gospel.

Very difficult to do that for long and not start to become the answer to that prayer, isn't it? I mean, if you don't want to be someone who is a laborer in the harvest, don't begin praying this prayer.

For some years now, we have supported the work of the Artidzo Institute. It's a way of raising up and training young people for full-time ministry in Christlikeness and competence.

And we've had many graduates who are serving Jesus in various capacities. And Artidzo is having a bit of a reset, a bit of a refresh this year.

And I'm looking forward in two weeks' time to introduce Ben Roberts as the new trainer. But the reason I'm mentioning it, the reason I mention it, is what Artidzo really needs is your prayers.

[17:14] That God would raise up laborers and that God would send them, throw them literally, cast them out into the harvest. Please pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest.

Beg him to send out more laborers into the harvest. It's a ministry of compassion. And notice, please, however, that Jesus does not tell us to pray that God would send out ministers, clergy, full-time paid laborers.

I'm there included. He's just asking for workers. Those who are willing to see as he sees and to promote the gospel and take his compassion to other people.

It's all of us. And I think that right here for us today, there is a temptation. And the temptation is to think that the harvest is not plentiful anymore.

It might have been in those days. It might have been 30 years ago. But things have changed. And they have. I think it's become more difficult to witness for Christ. And in the West, most Christian churches are finding their growth has certainly slowed.

[18:23] I think if you've been a Christian for more than 10 years, it begins to feel like the culture is more and more alien to us. We're in a cycle of city elections right now.

And we're covering very important issues that concern all of us. I'm so confused about all the candidates. I've just decided to drive around to all your houses and find out who I should vote for. Now, these are important issues. Housing. The overdose crisis. Governance. Nationally, we seem to be sprinting toward the implementation of the legalization of pot without anyone giving any consideration to what good it's going to do us except making us a bit of money.

And this week, the Toronto Sick Kids Hospital, which is known for saving kids' lives, announced they're drafting a policy on how to help children commit suicide. It doesn't feel like the culture...

It doesn't feel like there's a ripeness or a readiness in the harvest of people around us to hear the gospel. But I call it a temptation because I do think it is from Satan.

[19:34] Satan will do anything he can to stop the compassion of Jesus and to stop us praying and to stop the work of bringing people into the kingdom. Certainly, our circumstances have changed.

But there's never any shortage in the harvest. We're surrounded by people who are like sheep without a shepherd, harassed and helpless. His compassion hasn't changed.

The power of prayer hasn't changed. The gospel hasn't changed. The power of Jesus to impact someone's life and transform them hasn't changed. This is not a temporary command of Jesus that we have to confine to a couple of years of Galilee or, you know, a few years ago.

If you read through the gospel, when we come to the end of it, he says to all his disciples, go and make disciples of all nations. Yes, yes, of course, our circumstances have changed.

And yes, there are different and new barriers and challenges to sharing Christ. But our real challenge is not Islam or secularism or individualism or materialism.

[20:36] The real challenge today, as it was then, is a shortage of workers. Not enough Christians are engaged with this task. The challenge is not our circumstances, but whether we see as Christ does and feel as he does, whether we have the compassion that Jesus has, whether we are begging him to raise up laborers for his harvest.

Now, it just so happens that we have a community prayer gathering tomorrow night, Monday night. And you might suspect that we planned this very cleverly to preach this passage before we have a prayer meeting.

I wish we were that clever and cunning and calculating. And I don't want anyone to come to the prayer meeting out of guilt. I mean, the last three passages that we've looked at in Matthew's gospel have made it so piercingly clear that Christianity is about the forgiveness of our sins and the free grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And God doesn't need a big crowd before he's going to do something. And he hears our prayers very well when we pray on our own. You're not a bad Christian if you don't come.

I just want to get all that out. However, I do want to warmly invite you to come along tomorrow night. Because there's no better demonstration of our weakness and dependence on God, is there? This is how Jesus first engages us in his mission.

[22 : 05] And I just warn you, there's nothing flashy about the prayer meetings. Goodness, they're nowhere near as much fun as the children's thing Sunday by Sunday.

The prayers are stumbling and awkward. And I think that's absolutely perfect. Because our prayers are not heard for their gorgeousness, but because they're heard through Jesus Christ.

And Jesus promises that when two or three gather in his name, he is there, he's present with us. If you go through the Gospels from one end to the other, there are only really two things Jesus calls us to pray for.

One is the Lord's Prayer. And the other is this. That the Lord of the harvest would cast out laborers into the harvest. And so let me ask you, as I ask myself, is this on your prayer list?

Is it on your daily prayer list? To pray that God would throw out laborers into his harvest? Or has it become a monthly or a quarterly or a every now and again prayer?

[23 : 06] We need to be praying for each other as well. That we won't be frightened to invite friends. That they will see as Jesus sees and have his compassion.

And I just find when I'm praying these kinds of prayers, I have more opportunities to speak to others and to share Christ. Jesus is the same today, yesterday and forever.

And he sees Vancouver and his heart goes out to the city of Vancouver. He sees so many in our city who are like sheep without a shepherd, harassed and helpless.

And he wants us to feel as he feels. And all the different challenges of our culture and all the rejection or mocking of Jesus doesn't change his compassion.

He still remains painfully, passionately engaged. The first thing he does and the first thing he wants us to do is he calls us to pray. And so I finish and I ask you, will you commit to pray to the Lord of the harvest?

[24 : 10] That he will send out laborers into his harvest. Amen.