

Gut Moving Compassion

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 October 2018

Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[0 : 0 0] Well, good evening, everybody. It is so nice to see you all. If you don't know me, my name is Aaron Roberts. I'm the minister that looks after this service. We are looking at Matthew 9, 35 to 38.

So Matthew, as I've mentioned this before, Matthew, as a writer of the Gospels, he had a very tidy brain, and he wrote very carefully.

Secondly, you may have noticed, if you've been with us for the last month or so, that things in the Gospel appear to happen in chunks. Like there's a chunk where all it talks about is this, and there's another chunk, and all it talks about this is another chunk, and all it talks about this.

So like chapter 1, it's all we're introduced to Jesus, and it's the Nativity stuff, John the Baptist, Temptation of Christ. It's all the pre-ministry stuff in one kind of segment right there. And then chapters 5 to 7, it's just a big sermon.

All the sermon stuff is sort of put together, another big chunk. And then chapters 8 to 9, you remember, is Jesus does all these amazing things, his healings and exorcisms and his freeing people from all these things that would destroy them.

[1 : 0 9] It's three very clear segments. And we're about to enter another chunk, chapters 10 to 11.

It's all about the disciples. So the disciples go from being recipients of Christ's ministry to agents. So they're sent out and empowered to continue Christ's ministry.

But we're not there yet. That's next week. So as I said, Matthew has a very tidy mind. What he wants to do is he wants to transition us from the last chunk to the next chunk, from the last segment to the next segment.

And that's what verses 35 to 38 are. They're transitional passages. Have a look there. You see verse 35. Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming the gospel, healing every disease and every affliction.

It's a summary of the last few chapters. Teaching and healing. Teaching and healing. Teaching and healing. Verse 37 of our transitional passage says this.

[2 : 0 8] Then he said, Jesus thinks we need more people. We need more people to do this ministry. And so what's chapter 10 about? It's about Jesus commissioning his disciples and sending them out.

So our verses today, what do they do? They first of all, this is just context stuff for you. They look back at what Jesus has done up to this point. They look forward to what's coming up.

Now, this is a very boring way to start a sermon, I know. But I love context. And so you just have to put up with it.

I find context very, very helpful. Now let's jump into these verses. I think we can probably skip verse 35. As I said, it's a summary of what's just happened. But you do get the impression that there is a comprehensiveness, that Jesus had this grueling schedule.

It talks about throughout all the cities and villages. It says he heals every disease and every affliction. It kind of reminds us that the stuff we just read about is not the only things that Jesus did. He did a lot of stuff.

[3 : 13] And Matthew very surgically chooses the miracles and healings and exorcisms that he wants to mention. So we'll pass on that.

We'll keep going. Verse 36. Everywhere he went, he saw people. He saw crowds. And what was Christ's response to the crowds?

Compassion. He had compassion on them. There's a number of words in the New Testament that can be translated compassion. This is the most visceral.

It's not a polite word. But in the Greek, so the New Testament, if you're new to the Christian thing, the New Testament was originally written in Greek. And it's translated for us into English in our Bible.

So in the Greek, the root of this word means bowels. It's bowels. And I'm going to mispronounce it. It's a fantastic word in Greek. Splachnozomai.

[4 : 16] Just trust me. That is 100% perfect. Perfect. We do have any health professionals here this evening? I don't know if we do. But here we go. Splachinology.

At school? Yep. The study of the gut, I am told. So there's no actually English word that does this justice. We've translated it to compassion, but it's more than compassion.

It's a mix. It's compassion. It's sympathy. And it's pity. But it's much more. It's a deep. The reason it's the root is the gut, because it's a deep, it's a painful emotion. It's literally a gut-wrenching feeling that Jesus had when he looked out onto the crowds.

Matthew is saying that Jesus, he felt their hurt in his guts. On my way to work, I drive through the downtown east side.

And it is not a new, I live Hastings Sunrise, and the offices are in the city. And so I drive downtown east side. And it's not unusual for me to see people with needles in their arms.

[5 : 18] It's not unusual for me to go past people who are screaming or yell at my car or raging or who are covered in sores who look absolutely filthy. I feel sad. I feel pity. I feel compassion.

But I keep driving. And I go to work in my nice little car and my clean clothes with my hot lunch to my nice office. I feel pity, but I don't do anything. I feel compassion. This is another aspect of Christ's compassion here.

It's not just a feeling, like the feeling I get when I drive through the downtown east side. It's more than that. The compassion that Christ feels is a compassion that results in something. It produces action.

But we're going to get to that in a moment. Why does Jesus feel compassion? First of all, why does Jesus feel this compassion? It says here, they were harassed and helpless.

He looked at the crowds and he saw they were harassed and helpless. These are very vivid words. Again, in the original language, very vivid words.

[6 : 23] Harassed comes from the Greek word. It means to flay an animal open. Like if you imagine claws going across an animal and opening an animal up. Helpless is a terrible word. It's not just sort of like someone's a bit weak.

It's like taking somebody and throwing them down on the ground and holding them down on the ground. It's an awful word. It's an awful picture.

And then Jesus adds to it with a little word picture. He says, they were like sheep without a shepherd. They're harassed and helpless. It's like they're sheep without a shepherd.

Sheep are unique animals in that they almost define helplessness and stupidity. Sheep can't defend themselves. And they have trouble with just basic care.

They're not great foragers. They need a shepherd. They need a shepherd to take them around and show them where the good grass is. And they need a shepherd to protect them from the wild animals. Our Ezekiel reading reminds us that this has been a theme throughout the Bible.

[7 : 29] And our Psalm reading, of course, as well. That throughout the Bible, God describes himself as a shepherd to his sheep. And sometimes the shepherds that God appoints are corrupt or useless.

And Christ wants to be our shepherd. If we go back to Psalm 23, we see what the shepherd wants to do. We see what Christ wants to do for us as our shepherd.

The passage says in Psalm 23 that the shepherd will lead us by still waters. In other words, the shepherd will give us peace. Give us peace in our hearts.

It's a beautiful picture, right? Still waters. The shepherd will restore us. The shepherd leads us in paths of righteousness. That's what the Psalm says.

The shepherd guides us how we should live. It talks about the valley of the shadow of death. When death and disaster comes, the sheep don't have to fear because he's a shepherd.

[8 : 32] God comforts them. God is with them. And the first verse is a bit of a summary of it, actually, in Psalm 23. It's, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. It's just this beautiful picture, this amazing picture of a shepherd who's committed to the care of their sheep, that he will care for them, that he will look after them.

But what of those who don't know the shepherd? What of those who don't know the shepherd? What's the opposite of Psalm 23?

What's their experience? Of those who don't have a relationship with their heavenly father? I am in want. I have no eternal security.

There is no leading to still waters. When the shadow of death comes, I am on my own. And there is no assurance that I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

So Jesus looks at the crowds, and he saw their real state, their spiritual state, and it wrenched his gut.

[9 : 51] He felt compassion. I found this passage tremendously challenging.

How do I look at my friends who don't know Jesus? Some of them seem to be doing a lot better than me, to be honest. But Jesus reminds us of their spiritual state.

And he reminds us that our attitude towards folks who do not know the heavenly father should be one of compassion. Not jealousy. Compassion.

Compassion. And our desire should be that they know the shepherd. That they're actually not okay. Despite what it looks like, they're actually not okay.

Now, if people becoming Christians, if people getting to know the shepherd is not high on your list of priorities, because you tend to think, they're good people.

[11 : 00] Like, they're good people. They're good people. They seem to be doing all right. They're good people. Jesus exposes the wrongheadedness of that attitude.

And tonight, I think, if people not becoming Christians, if that's not high on your list of priorities in life, then tonight, maybe it's a good night for you to ask the Holy Spirit to change your heart.

Let's move on. Verse 37. Jesus looks out, and he says, The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. The harvest is plentiful, the laborers are few. It's a bit of an understatement, really, isn't it? It's a little bit of an understatement.

The harvest is plentiful, the laborers are one. At this point, it's just Jesus. And so Jesus says, This action is required.

Remember I said that this is compassion that produces action. That's what the word meant. So, action is required. And this is the bit of, I think, the surprise of the passage.

[12 : 00] Jesus looks out at these huge crowds. There's one worker. It's him. The stats aren't great. Jesus calls for action. And the single action he calls for at this point is prayer.

It's prayer. He doesn't organize. He doesn't strategize. He says, We've got to pray. In the face of immense need and tiny resources, Jesus says, We've got to pray.

And of course, like, you know, if we give it like a minute's thought, like, of course, of course we have to pray. The harvest, the passage says, is the Lord's. That's what verse 38 says.

It's the Lord's harvest. We pray because we believe that somebody becoming a Christian is a miracle, and it's God's work. So, of course we pray.

And it's the best thing we can do. There's a region in central Europe, a little area called Cilicia. It's around the Czech-Polish border.

[13 : 01] And a revival started there in the early 1700s. And Bruce Hindmarsh, you may have heard him talk about this if you're a student. He's written about this. And we know about this revival in the early 1700s in central Europe because somebody wrote a tiny little book in the 1700s about it.

It's more of a pamphlet. It's a very short book. And the little book, and it recounts what happens. And the little book is called this. In those days, these little pamphlet-y book things had really long names. And sometimes they had, like, double names.

Like, they named it twice. So here's the name on the first page. Praise out of the mouths of babes, or a particular account of some extraordinary pious motions and devout exercises observed of late of many children in Cilicia.

So that's the catchy title of this little book. So here's what happened. So there was this little town. And these children, they noticed some soldiers.

I think they were Swiss soldiers, Swedish soldiers, coming through their town one day, and they would pray outside. And they took note of that. And they believed their church to be dead. Pretty bit useless anyway.

[14 : 14] And so these kids and young people, they started praying. And what they'd do is they'd meet in these fields. They'd go to these fields, and they'd hold hands in a circle. And they'd pray, like, two or three times a day for hours.

And some parents thought that this was odd. This was a bit weird. And we need to shut this down, you know. And so in the little book, it talks about some parents, one parent, he sort of locked his kids up in their house.

And the kids threatened to shimmy down the downpipe, you know. And so he decided he relented and let them go. But there were some local authorities didn't like the idea of it.

It was sort of upsetting the bandwagon. Remember, this is sort of like a Northern Ireland type situation. There was Catholics and Protestants sort of butting heads in this region in particular. So some local authorities didn't like it.

And at one point, they sent the local hangman to where the kids were praying with a whip to disperse them. But the hangman came back crying because it was such a beautiful thing he'd witnessed.

[15 : 16] And he couldn't do it. Some adults started coming to watch these children and were so inspired. And what they'd do is the adults would hold hands around the children, make a circle around the children.

And they would pray. They were so inspired by this. And it caused this revival in this region. They built a church called the Jesus Church. And it was a great name.

And they would get 5,000 people turning up on Sundays. They had to start their services at 6 a.m. This is the 1700s, remember, in the middle of nowhere in Central Europe.

And this little revival spread geographically. And some folks who were particularly persecuted in the Catholic-Protestant thing went to Saxony.

Some families went to Saxony because they heard that there was this nobleman. I can't remember his name. But there was this nobleman who had this huge estate. And so they just started turning up on his estate. And he was a great guy.

[16:15] And so he just let more and more people come and knock on the door. And he goes, oh, yeah, they're all over there. And they basically formed a village on his estate. And this village grew, and it actually became something called the Moravian Brethren Movement, which if you haven't heard of, that's okay.

It's kind of a big deal in church history, but it's okay. And these guys, these villagers, sent missionaries out all over the world. And they became the first Protestant missionaries to Greenland, South Africa, Jamaica, North Carolina, Pennsylvania.

So these missionaries were a big deal. Moravians, Moravian Brethren Movement, went to London. It spread to London. John Wesley went to one of their meetings, and he describes being in their meetings, and he says in his diary, he goes, I found my heart strangely warmed.

And he had a personal reformation. Cut the story short here. John Wesley went on to become instrumental, like the key figure in the great awakening in America.

So when we talk about sort of the pervasiveness of Christianity in America, you point back to John Wesley. So, because you've got that all in your head, let's walk this backwards, all right?

[17:33] You look at history. You connect the dots. You can't explain the explosive rise of Christianity in North America without talking about John Wesley. You cannot explain his personal reformation, the reason he did that, without talking about the Moravians, Moravian Brethren Movement.

And you cannot tell that story without talking about the revival in this region called Cilicia. And you cannot explain the revival in Cilicia without talking about and pointing to its source, which was children holding hands in a field in the middle of nowhere.

Praying. They were praying. All that to say. I think we tend to think prayer is a thing that happens over here in sort of the corners of our church and home and maybe a quick prayer in the car or something.

And it's cool. It's important. But it's not very practical. It's more important to strategize and employ and deploy and do the action stuff.

And Jesus reminds us, no, prayer, goodness me, prayer is the first thing we do. It's the first thing we do. Don't let yourself believe the lie that it's not real Christian work.

[18:51] It's the first thing we do. Because the Lord is the Lord of the harvest. And folks, if we are not praying for the lost sheep, if that's not high on your priority list, Christ is challenging us tonight.

And perhaps tonight would be a good night to ask the Holy Spirit to change your heart about these things. And we get a chance to put it into practice very quickly because I want to remind us just as we finish here that tomorrow night is our quarterly prayer meeting.

David Short is going to be doing some Bible teaching. We're going to have some discussion. And we're going to have some time for prayer. And we're going to be talking about and praying for the lost sheep that we know.

Come along to that. Because as a church in Vancouver, the stats are not great, are they? We are one of, if not the most, non-Christian city in North America.

The city, we're selling more churches than we're building them. The stats are dire. And our action point, the thing Jesus says we must do first, is we must pray.

[20 : 06] We must pray. So would you come tomorrow and let's do this as a community. And would you commit to praying for your friends and family and for the city, for the lost sheep. Folks, I think this is a great word for us as a community.

And so I want us to move to just a time of reflection before Sean comes. So if we could have somebody just come up and pray for us for a couple of minutes.

And let's use this time to bring our hearts to Jesus. And if praying for our friends is not high on our priority list, our neighbours and family members, ask the Holy Spirit to change your heart in these next few minutes.

If when we look at our friends who don't know Jesus and we sort of go, they're actually pretty good. Jesus wants to change our hearts tonight. Amen.