

For the World

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[0 : 0 0] God, will you give us an increase of your grace this morning that we could truly hear your word brought to bear on our lives, and in doing so that we might bear forth the fruit of your spirit as by the same spirit we witness to you in this world.

In Jesus' name we pray, amen. Please be seated. Amen. Now our reading today from Matthew's Gospel, chapter 9, beginning at the 32nd verse and running through to the 38th is actually a short one.

The one read began with the 35th verse, but I want to go back a little bit by way of review because our reading today is like a hinge that holds a door and a frame together.

And that frame is the new mission of Jesus where the door is the new ministry and the room on the other side is a new reality of our Lord's.

You have that picture in mind. Let's look at those three dimensions through today's reading that I just named.

[1 : 2 4] We're going to look at them backwards, though. I know I'm calling on your imagination at the moment, but the first is this new reality and then the new ministry followed by a new mission.

Now I wonder if that makes sense to you. It's kind of like a film in Rewind, starting with the scene before Matthew, chapter 35 that Cindy read, which our Bible titles, the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

So let's start with the new reality. Last week, our eyes were opened to a new reality. Our vision was drawn to that in three ways. And first, Matthew's use of the word behold from his pen in Jesus' lips with regard to the death of a 12-year-old girl and also with respect to a woman who had bled for 12 years.

He was using this word behold, calling on our vision to look. Secondly, and more obviously, though, it was with two blind men who were given their sight.

They were given kind of two sights. First, their natural one, which they didn't have and was given to them, but also a spiritual one so that they could see on the one hand as far as the eye could, but now they were actually given another sight to see Jesus for who he is.

[2 : 5 1] And then thirdly, there were these two men who were delivered from demon possession. And they were given their speech for more than they initially saw or perceived.

I wonder if you remember what their response was. Their mouths were actually then opened to share and show forth who Jesus was. This was a new reality for the girl and the woman, the two blind men, and also two people who were possessed by demons and were mute.

But it was much more than what the initial glance or picture or our eyes reveal. In those cases, Jesus didn't just raise the dead and stop bleeding, but he gave through these people the world new life.

And then Jesus didn't just take away darkness. That is, what is black and kind of then white. But he actually gave to these people new vision in the world in which we live in.

And then finally, Jesus didn't just loose the men's tongues who were mute, but he gave the world a new message. This is why I've actually entitled this sermon A New World.

[4 : 10] There's this new reality. Jesus has come for the world. Last week, the readers of Matthew's Gospel had our eyes open to this new reality of God's world.

Jesus opened our eyes to see Jesus for who he really is. And to see Jesus, that one who gives new life, new sight, new message.

So that we'll know that Jesus loses no opportunity to reveal himself to us. That he authorizes, he strengthens, he confirms, and he perfects our faith in him alone.

And that's the purpose of why he chooses to raise the dead, restore, or deliver. Or sometimes, as we know and maybe experience, not to raise the dead, not to restore or deliver.

He loses no opportunity to give us faith, strengthen that faith, perfect the faith that he alone can actually give to us. And shows this, that he's in control of all circumstances before, during, and after those events and incidents in our life.

[5 : 23] To fix our eyes upon him. Now all that follows this new reality will then be a new ministry and a new vision. And it's for us to see the way that Jesus then sees the world.

First, to look at him and see him for who he is, and then to see the world the way he sees it. So there's this shift from a new reality of seeing Jesus to seeing the world the way he does.

And there is an order to this. And unless you see Jesus for who he is, you won't be able to see the world the way he sees it.

So seeing Jesus then helps us to see the world through his eyes. And that's what he wants for us in this text today. So let's then, secondly, look at this new ministry.

When we come to the scene today, we find a summary statement that Jesus makes. In fact, it's more like a new ministry strategy. It's not novel in terms of being new or fashionable in terms of being new, but it's unique.

[6 : 24] It's truly new. And there's something about Jesus' ministry that no one has ever seen before. So Matthew summarizes in these words. He says, Matthew's telling us Jesus wants about three tasks in this.

Teaching and healing. Those were chapters 5 through 7 and 8 and 9. Teaching in 5 and 7. Healing in 8 and 9. And in between this teaching and healing, Matthew places this proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom.

Now we're used to this if we read the Bible. But what is proclaiming? John Webster says that the gospel of the kingdom of God is an action of disorienting goodness.

I love that phrase. It relates the gospel of the kingdom of God to what's going on in the world in which we live in. Our world is oriented or structured around what we or what it thinks is right and powerful and beautiful.

And that's an idea or a lifestyle or an orientation. But Jesus comes along and he disorients the world and says, World, you're disoriented.

[7 : 53] And it's his goodness, our Lord's goodness and his grace and his glory that disorients the world with his proclamation. And this proclamation isn't just the message of Jesus, but that he is the sum and substance of this message, this proclamation.

And this is disorienting to the world, including you and me. And whenever we don't orient our lives to the gospel of the kingdom of God, then he comes along and disorients us and brings us back into orientation with who he is.

That, Ben, let me say this, is actually the sideboards of this doorframe. The teaching might be one part of the frame and his healing might be the other, and then the proclamation over the top of it is this frame of this new ministry that's brought to bear in the lives through the gospel of Matthew and ours as well.

So that's the new ministry. What about the new mission then, the door? There is the door on the frame that's held by the hinge. And this door is called a new mission. You see, Jesus first wanted to fix our eyes upon him, where he is the author and the perfecter of our faith, but he also wants us to see the world as he sees it.

So the new ministry, including teaching and healing and proclaiming, as I just mentioned, that's not just reorientation, but disorientation. And it leads to a new mission requiring us to see the world the way that Jesus sees it.

[9 : 28] And how does Jesus see this world? Well, verse 36 says, When he saw the crowds, he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Now, I don't know what you think about this, but it's not very flattering, right? To think of ourselves in the world as sheep. I won't go into that. But the operative word here is actually compassion.

And it's not what we think. It's not kind and gentle and sympathetic. No, actually, it's agonized and agitated and activated for the world.

Because the world is harassed and helpless and shepherdless. And this is the picture from both Ezekiel, as Cindy read, but also Jeremiah.

Let me read to you Jeremiah chapter 23, verses 2 to 4, what he says about this flock. The prophet says, Therefore, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning shepherds who care for my people, you have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them.

[10 : 39] Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the Lord. And then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply.

Jesus has great compassion for these people because they've been scattered because of their leaders. And this is the judgment of Jesus upon the Jewish leaders and the people.

He's not just making a diagnosis to say, Oh, you're sick. Now let me give you a prescription. Something more fundamental is going on here. Not just symptomatic.

This is a spiritual matter of sin and salvation. And so then Jesus makes another surprising and sweeping statement for the verses that follow. Remember, Jesus is agonized with his compassion.

He's agitated and activated. He's compassionate. And he switches then from this livestock with sheep metaphor to one of produce and harvest.

[11 : 47] He says, 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.

Now did you hear that? Did you hear Jesus? He makes a statement and doesn't say, Look at what's going on. Now get to work.

Or rather, maybe what he says is, Your work, he's not saying don't work, but he's saying your work is to pray. But pray to the Lord of the harvest.

See, because our temptation as Christians who are disciples and have a mission, is to turn this faith of ours into a cause or a movement.

Christianity is always about God first. What he is doing. How he sees the world. What he's doing about that. And how he does that through his son, Who is the substance and the sum of our faith.

- [13 : 00] The mission is about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. What it is that actually they're doing in the world. And how they draw us into their mission.
- Into our Lord's mission. And what they do for the world, That we can't do for it. What they do for us that we cannot do for ourselves.
- Because it's only by grace that we're saved. Through this faith that comes by beholding who Jesus is. And seeing the world as he sees it. And then when we do that, We take action with him through prayer.
- And as we'll see in the chapters to come, As he calls apostles and then sends them out To do his mission. But it first and always actually starts with prayer to the Lord of the harvest.
- There's this wonderful hymn. It has six stanzas to it. Which I'm not going to read all of them to you. But it's about prayer and work. Work and prayer. The title of it is, Behold Us, Lord, A Little Space.
- [14 : 04] And when we get to the sixth stanza, It brings this idea of work and prayer together. Different, but connected. For the purpose of mission. The last stanza reads like this, Work shall be prayer, If all be wrought, As thou wouldst have it done.
- And prayer by thee inspired and taught, Itself, With work, Be one. Friends, It's really important that we're involved in the mission of God And this harvest that Jesus sees is available.
- As the sheep are scattered, And they're vulnerable, And they're helpless, And shepherdless. And to be reminded that the Lord is our sheep. And that it's absolutely critical that we pray.
- And in fact, I'll make one more quote, Not a longish one, But every time that we say morning prayer, If you say that, You pray for this mission, This harvest in these words.
- And with this I'll end. God, the creator and preserver of all mankind, We humbly beseech thee for all sorts and conditions of men.
- [15 : 15] That thou wouldst be pleased to make thy ways known unto them, By saving health unto all nations. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.