

Harassed and Helpless

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[0 : 01] Let's turn for a little to the chapter we read, Matthew chapter 9. We read at verse 35, And 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.

And when he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. 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. There's no doubt about it, but that these were wonderful days when huge crowds were following the Lord Jesus Christ wherever he went.

But you couldn't get a greater contrast between the reaction of two different groups of people than what we find in verses 33 and verses 34.

Because we find there that when Jesus had healed this demon-possessed man that was a mute who was completely unable to say anything, we find that the reactions of two different groups is really quite amazing.

[1 : 17] You have first of all the crowds, verse 33. We find in the latter part of verse 33, And the crowds marveled, saying, When they marveled, there was this sense of awe, astonishment.

There was an excitement. They were standing back, saying, We have never, that's what they're saying, We've never seen anything like this in Israel. And they were right.

And it must have been quite extraordinary following Jesus and seeing him healing in the most marvelous ways. But then we see right beside them, we see like huge negative lumps, these Pharisees, and they are straight away putting down on Jesus.

It's really quite extraordinary because we find, But the Pharisees said, He casts out demons by the prince of demons. So you have, on the one hand, the people genuinely overwhelmed, and I send with us this great sense of awe, and then you have the Pharisees straight away stamping down upon it.

And they're not just killjoys. They are people who have a serious problem. And they're making the most horrendous statement because they are saying, Huh, do you know how Jesus is doing that?

[2 : 39] It's because he's in league with the powers of darkness. It's because of the powers of hell. He's casting out demons because he's in league with the demons. And it's blasphemy of the highest order.

And it's awful. And you know, when you look at the like of this, and you say to yourself, How on earth could people be so blinkered, so blind? And how grieving it is to God's spirit. But you know, sometimes we have to stop and say, You know, you can have maybe not as serious or not as critical a reaction as that.

But even to this day, on the one hand, you can have the Lord working, and he's saving souls. And you can have other people saying, You know, the Lord isn't doing anything today.

That is grieving the Lord. Because the most miraculous thing that happens in the world is when a passion is changed from darkness to life.

It is the most radical transformation that takes place within any passion's heart. People say there's no miracles. Well, this is a miracle. Where a person who was blind sees.

[3 : 48] A person who was spiritually deaf hears. A person who was spiritually dead comes to life. And it's happening. And it continues to happen. And how dare us ever say, Oh, the Lord is not doing anything.

That is grieving the Spirit of God. Because God is what... How do we know? And we continue to see. And it's happening, thankfully, all over.

Maybe not in the great ways. Some of you may have been privileged to have lived through times of revival. And I'm sure we would all love to be part of that.

I certainly would. And I'm sure you all would. But the fact is that the Lord still is working. And we must accept that. And rejoice.

And surely it is one of the most wonderful things. One of the greatest things. Is when we see somebody coming to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And so we find this extreme reaction between those who are overwhelmed.

[4 : 53] Those who are rejoicing. And those who are really putting down on the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. And then we see that Jesus, he went throughout all the cities and villages.

Teaching in their synagogues. And proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom. And the wonderful thing is that at this particular stage, the people just couldn't get enough of Jesus.

This was the time of his, where there was a great movement of, where there was a huge popularity movement towards and for Jesus.

The huge opposition to Jesus hadn't quite come yet. But it's coming. The powers that be are making sure of that. They're trying to gather momentum against Jesus.

But at this stage, the crowds couldn't get enough of Jesus. And you know, it's still the same today. Once a soul begins to sample Jesus.

[5 : 51] Once a soul begins to discover Jesus. You know, you can't get enough of him. And that's one of the wonderful things when a patient comes to faith in Jesus Christ.

They come to meet with a patient. Now, sadly, sometimes when we go on in our Christian lives, we can become used to it. But I think we can all go back.

And if we remember a time where we came to faith. Where the reality, the wonder, the newness, the thrill. The wonder of having this person with you.

You were aware of him. It wasn't just an idea. It was a reality. Jesus was present with you. You were conscious of it. This friend that you could speak to.

This person you could share with. He was there. It was real. And sometimes, as time goes on, we lose, sadly, something of the thrill, the wonder of it. And that's down to ourselves.

[6 : 47] It's not that the Lord has changed. But there's this wonderful thing. But you know, the beautiful thing about Jesus. And we've said it so often. He will never disappoint us.

You know, sometimes when we meet people and get to know them. And sometimes the more we get to know people, the more wonderful they become. But it's often the reverse. The more we get to know people, the more we discover maybe the faults and the failings.

But, of course, that's part of life. And when there are real friendships and love, then we overlook these things. And we forgive these things in one another.

But it's a fact of life that when we go under the microscope of people's viewing of us and where they discover more and more of us, they begin to see other sides, traits, characteristics that maybe aren't so obvious to begin with.

And maybe people can become disappointed in other people. But it's never so with Jesus. No follower, no true follower of Jesus Christ will ever turn around and say, you know, following Jesus has brought nothing but disappointment into my life.

[7 : 58] That doesn't mean that there won't be hard things or difficult things. That doesn't mean that at all. But it means this that Jesus himself, who he is, will never disappoint you.

He will fulfill. And it is something that is an eternal fulfillment. So we find that there are vast crowds. And at this point, they cannot get enough of Jesus.

And we read that when Jesus saw them, all these crowds, he had compassion upon them. And this is how Jesus is looking upon them.

Here are these crowds gathering. Because at this particular moment, as we say, this is about the high point of Jesus' popularity. He is the person of the day that everybody is wanting to see and to hear.

And you cannot help but look at Jesus in this situation and look at what you see in contemporary society, maybe great crowds gathering to see those celebrities, people of whether it's film stars or red carpet film premieres or whatever.

[9 : 05] And on occasions like that, I'm sure there's an awful lot of ego massaging and people are just basking in the celebrity status.

But nothing could be further from the truth with regard to Jesus. Because as Jesus looked at the people, all these people who had come to see him, all these people who had come to hear him, he didn't look at them and say, Oh, isn't that wonderful?

They've all come to see me, to hear me. Jesus was seeing them for who they were. And Jesus was seeing where they were in life. He was seeing things about them that they couldn't see about themselves.

And he could see the helplessness. He could see the situation that they were in. And his whole heart, his whole being was moved with compassion towards him.

That's the way that Jesus felt as he looked at this vast crowd. And so, as we say, he saw the people for what they really were. And that's one of the great expressions that's so often used about Jesus.

[10 : 10] That he had compassion or that he was moved with compassion. And we see that operating in so many different ways. The way that Jesus dealt with people in their need.

We see the difference in Jesus' dealing with people to the way that other people deal. For instance, we see Jesus, he had compassion for those who were in the powers of darkness, under the powers of darkness.

We saw it with this man, the mute. It was the same with Mary Magdalene. It was the same with Legion. Remember Legion? People couldn't cope with Legion. They ran away from Legion.

Then when they would try and deal with him, they would tie him up with ropes and with chains. It's the only way that the public knew how to deal with this man. But Jesus, when Jesus sees Legion, it's different.

He has compassion for him. And Jesus stops and deals with the situation. Here was this poor man who was absolutely in the grip of demonic power.

[11 : 15] He couldn't deliver himself. He was helpless. And you know the wonderful thing is that Jesus is the same today. He hasn't changed. And to any who are in the grip of whatever, who find themselves bound, they are captive, they are enslaved in their lives by whatever.

You find that there is something that's dominating your life and you cannot be delivered, you cannot be released. Jesus can. All power belongs to him.

And again you find Jesus' compassion in his dealings with those who have fallen. And the great example of that is Peter.

You remember how Peter denied Jesus with oaths and curses. And the last sight that Jesus had of Peter.

Remember this? The last sight that Jesus had of Peter was in that room. Remember, they were taken to the high priest's palace.

[12 : 19] And there was a fire and there was a fire and they were warming themselves and Jesus was being tried. And Peter had got in and he was being challenged as to whether he was a follower of Jesus.

And he was denying with oaths and with curses. I don't know Jesus. Jesus means nothing to me. And remember of how the cock crowed.

And it tells us that Jesus turned and looked at Peter. Because Jesus had told Peter that he was going to deny him three times. And we find Jesus turning.

And so the last sight that Jesus had of Peter before his death was Peter denying him.

The last words that Jesus ever heard from Peter. This is the Peter who said, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. This is the Peter who said, to whom else can we go?

[13 : 20] You have the words of eternal life. The last words that Jesus heard Peter proclaim before his death was, I don't know you. I don't know Jesus.

He means nothing to me. And when Jesus rose from the dead, he gave a message. We read about it in Mark. In Mark's gospel, he says, go and tell my disciples and Peter that I go before them into Galilee.

Isn't that lovely? He singles out Peter. The last thing Jesus had heard from Peter was him swearing and cursing and denying him.

And yet the first thing that Jesus does when he rises from the dead is he singles out Peter and says, tell Peter that I'm going before him and I'll meet him in Galilee.

Isn't that wonderful? That shows us the heart, the compassion of the Lord Jesus Christ. And again we see that compassion in Matthew later on.

[14 : 29] It tells us when he went ashore, he saw a great crowd and he had compassion upon them all and he healed their sick. And we've also got to remember that, that in all our illnesses, in all our diseases, that Jesus is not somebody who's not interested.

That Jesus, he, remember he is not somebody who is different. And some people have the idea that Jesus was different for 33 years in this world. And that was it. No.

He's always who he is. And that Jesus who had compassion upon the sick way back then still has compassion upon the sick today. And that is why we are to go to him in all our illnesses and our concerns about those that we love who are ill.

We're to bring it all to this Jesus who knows and who cares. Again we see the compassion of Jesus dealing with death. We find it so often, we found it, if we studied in this particular part, with the raising of the girl from the dead.

We find it with the widow of Nain. We find it with Mary and Martha. We find Jesus weeping at the grave. He has been touched with the feeling of our infirmities, our weaknesses.

[15 : 46] And if you've suffered bereavement and loss, Jesus wants you to throw yourself down upon him and cast yourself on him.

I know. I understand. He has a heart of compassion. Jesus, when he came into this world, we've got to remember he was a king.

But he didn't live with the trappings of a king. He lived as somebody who was just in total poverty. And so Jesus is somebody who understands from personal experience all the different hurts of life.

He had nothing. That's how he lived in dependence upon what other people provided for him. We saw that when we're looking at Mary Magdalene, that she was, despite the fact that she'd been demon-possessed, she was somebody we're told of means.

And there were many people who supported Jesus by the means that they had. But the thing is, he had nothing. He who was rich was made poor in order that through his poverty we might be made rich.

[17 : 04] But Jesus had nothing. When he came to die, all he had were the clothes that he had, and even these were stripped of him. That's where he was. And Jesus understands everything.

He was a victim of every form of abuse. He was violated in every way. He was mentally and physically and emotionally and socially abused.

He understands people's pains. He is a sympathetic high priest. But it's not only through the experiences that he had.

That's not the only reason why Jesus understands. It is because he is God of every God. He is the one who understands. And as we said, Jesus didn't just, at that period in this world, become.

He didn't just become compassionate. He was always compassionate. That is part of who God is. We read in Scripture that God is a consuming fire.

[18 : 07] We read about it. That he is a God of justice and judgment. But he is also a God of grace and truth and mercy and compassion. Psalm 103 and Psalm 145 we were singing.

The Lord our God is merciful and he is gracious. He is gracious, long-suffering and slow to wrath in mercy plenteous. Psalm 145. The Lord our God is gracious, compassionate is he also.

In mercy he is plenteous, but unto wrath and anger slow. We've got to remember that. Because sometimes we think of Jesus simply in his 33 years in his world.

And we think that the compassionate Jesus stopped then. No. The Son of God always was and always will be.

But then we see this description of Jesus again here. That when he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them. Because they were harassed and helpless. And they were like sheep without a shepherd.

[19 : 15] If you see a wild dog or a stray dog run into a field of sheep. I think these would be the two descriptions. If you see this dog and it just all of a sudden runs into a field of sheep.

And begins to run all around the sheep. Scattering them all over the place. I think these are the two descriptions you would give straight away. The sheep were look harassed and helpless.

Because that's the nature of the sheep. And that's as Jesus looked out upon the crowd. That's how he saw them. Harassed and helpless. And you know, when you look at that, what a description of today.

Because I think if you were to sum up. And there's lots of ways you could sum up society today. But I think one of them is harassed. Everybody's harassed. Everybody is being pushed. And there is pressure on all sides.

And people are feeling stressed and harassed. And I'm sure as Jesus looks out in society today. And looks at us today. That's what he's seeing. People who are harassed.

[20 : 16] And often helpless. So many people there. That's how they feel. If you went round tonight and probed down deep. Into so many people's lives. And say, how do you really feel?

If they were brutally honest. They would say, you know, I'm in a situation in my life. And I feel absolutely helpless. I don't see a way out. Sometimes it's through relationships.

Sometimes it's through poverty. Sometimes it's through just victims. It might be. There's just so many different reasons. But people. And it's not. But it's at every level in society.

People who may or outwardly appear everything to be going well. Deep down they feel helpless. They feel trapped. They feel harassed and stressed. And Jesus isn't saying, ah, well.

You've created this monster of a society for yourselves. Just get on with it. Jesus isn't saying tonight, ah, well. That's what they get. They've turned their back on me.

[21 : 15] Just on you go. You've made your bed lie on it. No. Jesus is still the one who is moved with compassion.

And he's looking out. And he's seeing people who are harassed. And people who are helpless. And if that's the way you feel tonight. Remember that Jesus is there.

And he's saying to me, I am the shepherd. I'm seeing you like sheep without a shepherd. Well, I'm here as a shepherd. I'm here for you. And it's so important for us to understand that.

But then as Jesus looked at the situation. And it's very easy for us as we look at the situation in our own lives. As we look out. As we look out in Stornoway and Lewis and Scotland.

The United Kingdom. As we look out in this world. And we see, as we often talk about, a broken society. And we might say, oh, it's all so helpless. What can be done?

[22 : 18] Jesus is looking at it with different eyes. Jesus is looking out at all the potential. And he says to the disciples, The harvest is plentiful.

That's what he's doing. He's looking out and he's seeing. There's a harvest out there. And it's plentiful. And he says, The labourers are few. Therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord.

Off the harvest. To send out labourers into the harvest. Christ. So we look out tonight and we see the situation.

And it's very easy to become despondent. Because we see nationally. There's no question but that people are turning their back more and more upon the Christian faith. And becoming quite opposed to the Christian faith.

And many are at work seeking to, not only to undermine, but to obliterate the Christian faith. Very easy to become despondent and say, oh, we've had it. And to curl up into a little ball and say, oh, well, the good days are over.

[23 : 24] Let's just see what we can end up like in the days of the judges and Gideon. Where they were just thrashing a little bit of wheat away locked in a cave. That's not the way the Lord wants us to be.

He says, you've got to pray. There's a harvest out there. There are souls out there. And they're harassed and they're helpless. And they are sheep without a shepherd. They need a shepherd.

But they need your prayer. And that's what we need to do is to pray. And not to be condemning and judging. But that we would be given the heart of Jesus. And that we would pray to the Lord.

And you know this, when we begin to pray to the Lord in this way. That we would have the heart of the evangelist. It's amazing. The Lord will respond. It's going to involve work.

But ask the Lord, give me the words. Give me the heart to speak to people. Give me, help me to see what people are at. You know, if we could see souls making, being, if we could see where people are going.

[24 : 24] If we could see the lostness of hell. The destiny that people are going to. As they turn their back upon Jesus. They're helpless. They're shepherdless.

They need Jesus. And if the church won't pray. Then who is going to pray? You know, at the end of the day. The Lord is going to say to us.

Did you pray to the Lord of the harvest. To send out laborers. The harvest is plentiful. That's what the Lord is saying.

And it's the Lord's harvest. But the laborers are few. A harvest requires work. Harvest isn't gathering itself.

It involves laboring. It involves rolling up the sleeves. It involves getting the hands dirty. And that's what the Lord is saying. Look, you've got a job to do.

[25 : 22] And you need to be in prayer. Pray the Lord of the harvest. And I would ask that whatever we do. That we would seek to have this desire.

This prayerful heart within us. Seeking that the Lord would indeed. Give an answer to this prayer. Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest.

It's not just a wee prayer now and again. This is the earnest prayer. Where's an example of earnest prayer? An example of earnest prayer is Elijah. It tells us in the scripture.

That Elijah prayed earnestly. How do we find Elijah praying earnestly? It's when he was praying for rain. And remember he prayed. And he prayed. And he prayed.

And he looked. And he sent his servant. And he prayed. And he continued to pray. And he continued to pray. Why was he praying? He was basing his prayer upon the promise of God. And he prayed until the rain came.

[26 : 19] And here we have the promise of God. It's Lord's harvest. He will send out laborers. But he requires us to pray earnestly. Like Elijah prayed.

Not a wee half-hearted prayer here and there. It is passionate, urgent, earnest prayer. And the Lord would respond to that. May we then have that heart.

And may we have hearts of compassion. Ask the Lord for hearts of compassion. If your heart is hard tonight. And you're not interested in people's spiritual welfare.

Ask the Lord to give you a heart of compassion. And to give you the prayer for a harvest. And for laborers for that harvest.

Let us pray. O Lord our God. We give thanks for the promises that you give us in this word. And we pray that we may indeed pray earnestly. That the desire of our heart will be in keeping with your word.

[27 : 21] Forgive us Lord for when we're careless and indifferent. Indifferent maybe to other people's spiritual needs. May we have the heart that resembled the heart of Jesus.

A heart that wept over those who were rejecting him. Lord be near to us we pray. Bless us. Take us to our home safely. And bless the fellowship afterwards. With your presence and nearness.

Do us good and cleanse us from our sin. In Jesus name. Amen. Our concluding psalm is from Sing Sam. Psalm 126. Psalm 126 from Sing Sam.

And the tune is Brother James. Psalm 126.

You'll find that on page 171. When science fortunes God restored. It was a dream come true. Our mouths were then with laughter filled.

- [28 : 27] Our tongues with songs anew. The nation said the Lord has done great things for Israel. The Lord did mighty things for us. And joy our hearts knew well.
- Restore our fortunes gracious Lord. Like streams in desert soil. A joyful harvest will reward the weepish. Weeping sower's toil. The man who bearing seed to sow.
- Goes out with tears of grief. Will come again with songs of joy. Bearing his harvest sheath. Page 171. The whole of the psalm. When Zion's fortunes God restored.
- It was a dream come true. Our mouths were then with laughter filled. Our tongues with songs anew.
- Our mouths were then with laughter filled. Our tongues with songs anew.
- [29 : 36] The nations said the Lord has done great things for Israel. The Lord did mighty things for us.
- And joy our hearts knew well. The Lord did mighty things for us. And joy our hearts knew well.
- We stored our fortunes gracious Lord. Like streams in desert soil.
- A joyful harvest will reward the weeping sower's toil. A joyful harvest will reward the weeping sower's toil.
- The man who bearing seed to sow. Goes out with tears of grief.
- [30 : 50] Will come again with songs of joy. Bearing his harvest sheep.
- Will come again with songs of joy. Bearing his harvest sheep.
- Now may the greatest mercy and peace of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore. Amen.
- Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.