

Putting Compassion into Action

Matthew 9:35-38

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Earlier this year, during what's called the Kumbh Mela festival, an estimated 400 million Hindus gathered over 45 days at the Ganges River in India. This is the largest religious festival on earth. People came from every corner of the country on trains, buses, and even on foot, just to wade into the murky, polluted waters. Many pilgrims traveled extraordinary distances, sometimes for weeks or months. According to legend, a drop of the nectar of immortality spilled into the river during a cosmic battle in the supernatural world. As a result, Hindus believe the Ganges has the power to wash away their sins.

It's so sad to see how millions upon millions of people are being deceived as they search for cleansing, forgiveness, and peace. The tragedy is that no amount of dirty river water can cleanse an unholy human heart. Only the blood of Jesus Christ can do that.

Knowing that Kishor, one of our Go Team partners from India was saved out of Hinduism, I called him this week to thank him for joining us for Go Con. He told me it was the best missions conference he's ever been part of. I told him I also wanted to understand this cleansing festival correctly. He told me he was part of it when he was 15 years old. In his words, he *"remembers walking and running mile after mile to worship evil spirits."* When I asked him how this makes him feel now, he said, *"I feel terrible for people because Satan is blinding them. I'm grateful to God for saving me from that Hell. Unfortunately, very educated people participate in this but never have their sins forgiven."*

Before we shake our heads, let's remember that people all around us are doing something similar. They may not be traveling to the Ganges, but they're running to careers, relationships, pleasures, possessions, or even religion, hoping those things will wash away guilt and fill the emptiness in their souls. But none of it works. Many are in desperate need of forgiveness but can't find it.

This was brought home to me this week when I was at Youth Hope to mentor a fourth-grade boy in the Men of Valor and Excellence program. When I discovered he and another boy were having some serious conflict, I encouraged them to practice forgiveness. They refused. When one boy finally apologized, his classmate reluctantly forgave him but threatened he would retaliate if he was hurt

again. I was pleased about all this until one of them cussed the other one out in the gym just a few minutes later.

When Jesus looked at the crowds, He didn't just see faces; He looked into their souls and saw them searching for forgiveness and fulfillment. We see this in Matthew 9:35-38: ***“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. 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.’”***

Here's a summary statement: *We won't serve people, or live as sent ones, until we see people like Jesus did.*

I see three ways you and I are to follow the example of Jesus.

1. Serve like Jesus served. In verse 35, we see that Jesus continued to serve by going everywhere with the gospel to both big cities and tiny towns: ***“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.”*** Beth and I served as missionaries in Mexico City, one of the largest cities in the world and we've served in Pontiac, a small community. Both have unique needs and opportunities, but communities of all sizes matter to the Savior.

Even though Capernaum was his hometown, as the ultimate missionary, Jesus didn't stay there. The historian Josephus tells us three million people lived in 204 cities and villages in this region. Likewise, we're to go with the gospel to where people are. I'm reminded of what Todd Ahrend said last weekend: *“In the Old Testament, people were told to ‘come and see.’ In the New Testament, we're to ‘go and tell.’”*

This shows us how Jesus intentionally went where people lived, using a threefold strategy.

- **Teaching in their synagogues.** In synagogue services, the Bible was expounded and explained so people could learn about God.

- **Proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom.** The word “*proclaiming*” is the word “*preaching*” and it’s where Jesus communicated the “*gospel,*” which means, “*good news.*”
- **Healing every disease and affliction.** While many benefited from Jesus’ healing, the main purpose was to authenticate His mission and His message.

We see that Jesus ministered to the mind by teaching, to the will by preaching, and to the body by healing. He edified in the synagogues, evangelized in the streets, and extended healing to the hurting wherever He went.

In a similar way, we must intentionally step into the lives of others by seeking to build up believers, by preaching the gospel to unbelievers, and by looking for ways to help people find spiritual, emotional, and physical healing in Jesus.

We won’t serve people. or live as sent ones. until we see people like Jesus did.

2. See like Jesus saw. Verse 36 says: “*When He saw the crowds, He had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*” The Greek word for “*saw*” means, “*to see with penetrating perception.*” When He scanned the crowd, He didn’t just see a mass of humanity, He saw individual souls made in the image of God. This means He took the time to look and assess what people needed.

In Mark 6:36, the disciples arrogantly direct Jesus to get rid of the crowds because they saw them as an inconvenience: “*Send them away to go into the villages and buy themselves something to eat.*”

- Where the disciples saw an interruption, Jesus saw an opportunity.
- Where they saw a sea of society, Jesus saw wandering sheep in need of a Shepherd.
- The disciples saw the crowds as demanding; Jesus saw them as directionless.
- To the disciples, the crowds were a burden; to Jesus, they were broken.
- They wanted relief from the crowds; He wanted to bring relief to the crowds.
- They saw people with problems to solve; Jesus saw people with souls.
- They saw the crowd as burdensome, Jesus saw brokenness.
- To the disciples, the crowds were a hassle, to Jesus they were harassed and helpless.
- Jesus saw a harvest; they saw a headache.

Write this down: *You have never looked in the eyes of someone who doesn't matter to God because everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about.*

Jesus saw behind the facades of self-sufficiency, self-righteousness, and self-confidence and knew all about their hurts, habits, and hangups (as we say in Celebrate Recovery). He knows all about the idols in our hearts and the addictions that are strangling us. This makes me think of what was said about Jesus when He encountered a man who was solely focused on his status and his shekels in Mark 10:21: ***“And Jesus looking at him, loved him...”***

If we struggle to love someone, it might be because we're not really looking into their souls with penetrating perception. If we look, we'll see many are carrying loads they cannot bear. One pastor suggests we pray a prayer like this: *“Lord, let me see what you see. Open my eyes that I may have a good, long, hard look at the full spectrum of the deep needs of the people around me. Give me your eyes that I might see what you see.”*

When Jesus saw souls, He was moved with ***“compassion for them.”*** Our word ***“compassion”*** comes from Latin, which means, *“to suffer with.”* It has the idea of *“deep sympathy and pity.”* In our culture, when we speak about feeling something deeply, we talk about feeling it in our hearts. In the first century, it referred to something deeper and much lower. Our word “spleen” comes from the Greek word used here. The idea is that there is a visceral reaction including a rush of blood when faced with something sad. Let's clean it up a bit by defining it like this, *“feeling pain in our guts.”*

However, compassion is more than just having strong feelings. Compassion means to feel someone's hurt in your own heart so deeply that you want to do whatever you can to help alleviate it. Don't miss the fact that the perfect Son of God condescended to feel inward pain when He saw the paralyzing problems of people. Luke 19:41 tells us when Jesus drew near to Jerusalem and saw their hard hearts, ***“he wept over it.”***

Here are a few verses from the Gospels that show how compassion must lead to action.

- Matthew 14:14: ***“When He went ashore He saw a great crowd, and He had compassion on them and healed their sick.”***
- Mark 6:34: ***“When He went ashore He saw a great crowd, and He had compassion on them...and He began to teach them many things.”***

- Matthew 15:32: ***“Then Jesus called his disciples to Him and said, ‘I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.’”***

As we continue in verse 36, we’re told why Jesus was moved with compassion: ***“...because they were harassed and helpless.”*** The word **“harassed”** means, *“to be worn out, oppressed, troubled, and torn up.”* **“Helpless”** refers to being *“neglected and abandoned, as if thrown down on the ground and left for dead.”* Jesus sees people wandering aimlessly through life with no direction or planned destination.

To Jesus, all these hurting, hopeless and helpless souls reminded Him of ***“sheep without a shepherd.”*** Matthew chose this metaphor because his Jewish readers would understand this as a rebuke to the religious leaders. 1 Kings 22:17 says, ***“I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd.”***

Sheep without a shepherd are in a very precarious position because they are prone to wander, are vulnerable to attack, injure themselves easily, and become very anxious when left alone.

I like how Ray Pritchard summarizes this section of Scripture.

*Until you see, you will not feel.
 Until you feel, you will not know.
 Until you know, you will not care.
 Until you care, you will not pray.
 Until you pray, you will not go.*

A man fell into a pit and couldn’t get himself out.

An empathetic person came along and said, *“I feel for you down there.”*
 A self-righteous person said, *“Only bad people fall into pits.”*
 A gossip inquired, *“Give me all the details.”*
 A self-pitying person said, *“You should see my pit.”*
 A judgmental person said, *“You deserve your pit.”*
 A psychologist noted, *“Your parents are to blame for your pit.”*
 A self-help group said, *“Believe in yourself and you can get out of the pit.”*
 An optimist said, *“Things could be worse.”*
 A pessimist said, *“There’s nothing worse than this.”*

Jesus seeing the man reached down, took him by the hand and lifted him out of the pit.

Jesus knows that we must first develop great compassion before we will live out the Great Commission. *We won't serve people, or live as sent ones, until we see people like Jesus did.*

3. Send like Jesus sent. As a result of seeing these harassed and helpless sheep, Jesus switched metaphors to a field of ripe grain in Matthew 9:37: ***“Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.’”*** Do you see the key word in this verse? It's the word ***“then.”*** Jesus saw, He felt, and He knew...and then He called his disciples to action. The word ***“plentiful”*** means, ***“great, many, and much.”***

I was in central Illinois recently and saw fields of corn and soybeans ready to be harvested. This is what the farmer waits for all year long. This is Go Time! I spent many hours in combines when I needed to meet with one of our church leaders who farmed. Farmers gladly work long hours because they want to finish before the weather changes, so they don't lose their crop. Jesus put it like this in John 4:35: ***“Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest.”***

An Edgewood pastoral prayer warrior who is also a fellow Culver's Curderburger enthusiast, sent me these encouraging words this week: ***“And in our days, our merciful God is transferring an unprecedented number of souls from the Kingdom of Darkness to the Kingdom of Light! In 1900, there were 10 million Christians in Africa. By 2024, there were 734 million! Over the past century, the number of churches worldwide has increased 1000% from 420,000 to 4,200,000!”***

Recently, I was struck by Matthew 13:37-38: ***“The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom...”*** We're called to take the Word to the whole world. What I hadn't seen before was that Christians are the ***“good seed”*** that is to be sown in the soil of people's souls. As our mission statement puts it: ***We're called to live on mission by glorifying God and making disciples of Jesus in our families, among our neighbors and among the nations.***

As Todd Ahrend said last weekend, ***“A global Christian is one who has discovered the truth and need of God's unfulfilled global purpose to reach all peoples.”*** As Acts 1:8 says, we start local and go global. These days, we're hearing reports of

many repenting and receiving Christ. I love watching how God is using FCA in our local schools and how so many of our sports teams pray with their opponents after games.

A year ago, Dr. Christopher Yuan was the keynote speaker for our Holy Sexuality Conference. After a terrible fall a couple weeks ago, Christopher was left paralyzed from the neck down. After a successful operation where a rod was inserted in his back, he was reported to be moving his arms and legs. While he was in the ICU, he asked people to *“pray that through this situation many more people will come to know Jesus and the gospel!”*

God answered Christopher’s prayers in the middle of the night. While in the ICU, he shared a room with a young man named David. Their beds were separated by just a sheet, allowing room for nurses and medical staff to tend to the patients. Listen to what his mom Angela wrote: *“God opened an incredible door for the gospel. In the middle of the night... Christopher began sharing his testimony and the good news of Jesus with his suite mate. By 5:00 a.m., David’s heart was ready. There in the ICU, he surrendered his life to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior! A nurse was present the entire time and witnessed this sacred moment.”* Brothers and sisters, we must be gospel ready at all times.

As we learned last weekend, there are still over 3,100 language groups with no Bible or church. The fields are ripe. The harvest is massive, but Jesus tells us the shortage is not in the harvest; it’s in the workers. As Todd Ahrend said, the workers are few because we’re often not aware of the needs and we’re distracted. In addition, the remaining language groups are very difficult to reach.

We’re surrounded by broken and hurting people, who are longing to find forgiveness and searching for a fresh start. Many are trying rituals that will never work, and others are wading into polluted waters in a vain attempt to have their sins washed away. Let’s gather, grow, give and go with the gospel like never before! Habakkuk 2:14 says, ***“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”***

While the harvest is huge, the task remains unfinished because the ***“laborers are few.”*** Harvest work demands harvest workers. Jesus used the word ***“laborers”*** on purpose to show this is not easy work. We’ll never reach our families, our neighbors, or the nations for Christ if we only give our leftovers to the Lord. Laboring for the Lord in His harvest requires a major rearrangement of our

priorities and involves sacrifice, surrender, and steadfastness in how we live, how we give, and how we go with the gospel.

As we learned last weekend, our mission is this: *“By the power of the Holy Spirit, we go to every nation and make disciples by declaring the gospel and gathering these disciples into healthy churches.”*

What Jesus says next is unexpected. He doesn't say we need more preaching or teaching, more committees or conferences. These are all worthy activities but in Matthew 9:38, Jesus has something much more powerful in mind: ***“Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into the harvest.”*** To ***“pray earnestly”*** means, *“to beseech, to urge, to ask for a specific need.”* Notice He is the ***“Lord of the harvest”*** and He's the one who sends out laborers into His harvest. We're to plead and pray with earnest urgency that God will stir His people to become holy workers in harvest work. Because there's a gap between the work and workers, we must pray for more to go.

Eugene Peterson paraphrases it like this: *“‘What a huge harvest!’ he said to His disciples. ‘How few workers! On your knees and pray for harvest hands!’”*

I turn to Ray Pritchard again for some helpful insight:

And how are we to pray? Jesus said we are to ask the Lord of the harvest to “send forth” workers. The underlying Greek word conveys a very powerful image. The word is *ekballo*. The *ek* part means “out” and the *ballo* part means, “to throw” (like throwing a ball). It comes into English as the word “ballistic,” which refers to the explosion that occurs when the hammer of a pistol hits a bullet, propelling it out of the gun. We are to pray that God will light a fire inside the church that will ignite a movement inside many hearts that will result in people being “thrust forth” from the church into the harvest fields of the world. *We need to pray that God will throw some people out of the church.*

“Lord, throw them all the way to Uganda.”

“Lord, throw them all the way to Tijuana, Mexico.”

“Lord, throw them all the way to India.”

“Lord, throw them all the way to Thailand.”

“Lord, take your people gathered in comfort in this beautiful sanctuary and blast them out of this place and into the distant corners of the world.”

Let's come back to the crowds of people in India looking for forgiveness of sins. Let's see them with eyes of compassion, for that's how Jesus sees them, and that's how He sees you. Perhaps you have not yet received Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. It's time to recognize that like sheep, you have gone astray and turned to your own way. Isaiah 53:6: "***All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.***" You don't need to find a dirty river because Jesus shed His blood as full payment for all your sins. Your next step is to repent and receive Him as the resurrected Shepherd of your soul. Trust Him right now.

Action Steps

1. **Pray intentionally.** If you're not sure what to say, you could pray something like this: "*Father, You are the God of the nations. You made them, they have turned from You, and You are drawing them back to Yourself. Raise up missionaries from our church and other churches to take the good news of Jesus Christ to the lost and unreached who have never heard and help us to send well. In Jesus' name, Amen.*"
2. **Set an alarm on your phone for 9:38 to help you remember to pray Matthew 9:38:** "***Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into the harvest.***" One person who is practicing this habit writes, "*I need that nudge. Life distracts me too easily...these reminders create a sense of urgency. Every day, 170,000 people worldwide step into eternity – most without Christ. The time is short. The mission is clear. The harvest is waiting...the alarm may last only a few seconds, but the reminder is eternal: the harvest is plentiful, the time is short, and the call is now.*"
3. **Be willing to go where God wants you.** Right after Jesus urged the disciples to pray, they learned they were not to stay where they were. As chapter 10 begins, Jesus calls and commissions the disciples in verses 1-4. In verses 5-7, He tells them three times to "**go**" and proclaim, "***the kingdom of heaven is at hand.***" The disciples end up being the answer to the prayer they were instructed to pray. I encourage you to pray along with Isaiah, "***Here am I, Lord. Send me.***"
4. **Hold the rope for a missionary.** As we learned last weekend, the sender starts the story. In 1792, William Carey, known as the "father of the modern missionary movement," challenged his Baptist brethren to obey their responsibility to take the Gospel to unreached lands. He told a group of

churches that he was willing to go into the pit [of India] but only if they would hold the rope. Andrew Fuller said he would hold the rope. There would be no William Carey without Andrew Fuller. This rope analogy expresses a biblical truth: New Testament missions was designed by God to be a team effort. For every missionary that goes on the field there must be churches at home holding the rope.

5. **Light it up in your neighborhood on October 31.** Consider yourself sent to your street.
6. **Attend the Unreached Prayer Night on Monday night at 7:00 pm.** I won't be able to make it because I'll be supporting the benefit concert for Safe Families, one of our local Go Team partners. The prayer time will focus on North Africa.
7. **Intentionally share the gospel with someone this week.**
8. **Fill out a Go Con Response Card.** A number of people already filled one out and we want to give everyone an opportunity the rest of this month to do so. Some checked all five boxes! My favorite response was written on the back of a card: *"I am 84 and I want to serve the Lord as long as I live. I have been praying I can be a blessing and serve God and others with all my heart."* Someone else wrote, *"I want to be a more active sender."*

We're going to end with communion today, but first, I want to pray a prayer written by another pastor.

Lord of the harvest, we confess how comfortable it is to come to church to worship with Your people. We are so richly blessed. Yet, Lord, we are so poor.

*We have eyes but do not see.
We have ears but do not hear.
We have lips but do not speak.
We have feet but do not go.*

We thank You for loving the world. We know that You take no pleasure in the death of the wicked. You desire that no one should perish but that all should come to repentance. Thank You for inviting us to join You in bringing Your message to the world.

Lord, take our children and our grandchildren and thrust them forth to the ends of the earth. We offer You our best and our brightest in the service of the King of Kings. Not just our young but also those in the middle years and those who are seniors. Blast us out of our complacency. Lord, while You are sending others, send us also.

O God, do things we're not used to. Do things that would baffle and amaze us if we knew them in advance. Send us forth as ballistic believers to Indonesia, Nepal, Jordan, Sri Lanka, China, Uzbekistan, Spain, Angola, Romania, Ecuador, Grenada, and to the remotest ends of the earth.

We pray for the Langworthy's as they prepare to leave for Uganda and we pray for Addy Holmquist as she serves in Tijuana, Mexico.

Now we ask You to ignite a fire in our hearts. Thrust us out from this place to the very ends of the earth. Give us Your heart and make us willing to go. Send us. O Lord, send me. Raise up a new generation of workers for Your harvest field.

Prepare us now for communion as we confess any sins that are in the way. We ask forgiveness and turn from them. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Communion

The bread and the cup remind us of the broken body and shed blood of Jesus. But they also redirect us to the scope of His mission. His death wasn't limited to Israel, or just to America, nor to one culture, language, or ethnicity. Jesus said in Matthew 26:28, ***"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."*** That word "many" stretches across continents, cultures, and centuries.

As we eat and drink today, we are joining a global family of blood-bought believers in villages and cities, jungles and deserts, house churches and cathedrals. Communion is both a memorial of what Christ has done and a preview of the great wedding feast of the Lamb, when all nations will be glad, as together, we gather around His table to give Him praise.

Let's not only remember what Christ has done for us, but also long for what He is still doing among the nations. Let's thank God for including us in His forever

family and pray for the day when the task will be completed, when every tribe, tongue, and nation will be represented at the eternal table of the Lamb.

When we eat this bread and drink this cup, we remember that Christ died not only for us here but for people everywhere. Every time we take communion, we're proclaiming the gospel—to one another and to the world—until He returns.

Distribute Elements

New Member at 10:45 – David Crownover

Benediction

The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace as you give and go with the gospel to your neighbors and the nations so that God's way may be known on earth, His saving power among all peoples everywhere.