

Go!
Part 1 – Before We Go
Matthew 9:35–38

Rev. Jeff Chapman ~ October 12, 2025 ~ Faith Presbyterian Church

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³⁵Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. ³⁶When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” (Matthew 9:35–38, NRSV)

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When the Son of God visited earth, how did he spend his time? Jesus only had 24 hours a day, just like you and me. So how did he use those hours? We don’t know much about the first 30 years, though it’s fair to assume that before his public ministry Jesus’ days were spent with family, working as a carpenter, doing his chores, going to synagogue, the normal stuff of life. We have a much clearer picture of the last three years of his life, recorded in the four Gospels, and Matthew chapter 9 is as good a sample size as any. Maybe what we have in that chapter is a day in the life of Jesus.¹

As Matthew tells it, in the morning some men bring their paraplegic friend to Jesus. Jesus not only makes this guy walk again, but declares that his sins are forgiven as he walks away. After that he goes and recruits another disciple, this one the most unlikely of all. And not only did he recruit this hated tax collector, he then joined a dinner party full of other degenerates to celebrate his recruitment. Well, once again this infuriated the other religious leaders of the day, who attacked him for these things, for putting love over rules. That didn’t stop Jesus from loving them in return. In fact, later in the day he goes and brings back to life the dead girl of one of these same leaders. On his way to raise this dead girl, a desperate woman gets healed after twelve years of bleeding, and subsequently freed from the rejection her condition had caused her. Before the day ends, two blind men see again, and a demon-possessed man, unable to speak because of the

evil residing in him, is set free. Just another day in the life of Jesus. And Matthew tells us that all who watched these things declared, “**Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel.**”²

That’s how Jesus spent his days on earth. Matthew summarizes it all in verse 35, “**Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness.**” In other words, the events recorded here are just a sampling of the sorts of things Jesus did when he was with us. It’s all summed up with the phrase “good news of the kingdom.” The Greek word translated “good news” here is the word *euaggelion*. It’s where we get our word “evangelism.” It’s often translated “gospel.” That’s what “gospel” means, “good news.” And good news is an accurate summary of the way Jesus spent his days.³

In 1st century Israel, that word “gospel” had two principle meanings. For faithful Jews it brought to mind the long-awaited coming of the Messiah who was to come one day and claim victory over evil and rescue God’s people, an event clearly prophesized all through the Old Testament. But in the wider Roman world, the word was also used any time a new emperor ascended to power, bringing with him a whole new order. Think today of national celebrations after a new leader is elected, a leader many people believe will finally turn things around for the whole nation. When you therefore combine these two meanings, the word “gospel” in those days didn’t just mean good news about individual salvation, but also included good news about the inauguration of a whole new world order. This wasn’t just good news that might help save me, but good news that came with the promise of a coming new kingdom for everybody. This is “good news of the kingdom!”⁴

It so happens that the Kingdom of God is actually a major theme in the Gospel of Matthew. I love how Dallas Willard defines the Kingdom of God: “The range

¹ Though the Gospel writers, including Matthew, often grouped Jesus’s teachings and miracles thematically rather than in strict chronological order.

² Matthew 9:33. This and all biblical citations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

³ <https://biblehub.com/greek/2098.htm>

⁴ I’m indebted here to N.T. Wright, *Luke for Everyone* (Westminster John Knox, 2001), 307–308.

of God's effective will, where what he wants done is done."⁵ In other words, anything and everything that is in line with the will and desires of God, that is the Kingdom of God. It's not God's desire that people are paralyzed, or blind, or inhabited by evil, or ostracized, or condemned, or, for that matter, dead. And so when these things are reversed, the Kingdom of God breaks in. This is why we should never imagine that the gospel is narrowly limited to individual people believing something true so that they can go to heaven when they die some day. It's far more than that. The gospel includes that, yes, but is also about the Kingdom of God coming to earth in such a comprehensive way that eventually everything in the world is set right again, all of it finally done as God wants things done. As the great Dutch theologian, Abraham Kuyper once declared, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, 'Mine!'"⁶

The Old Testament prophets spoke of this coming Kingdom constantly and vividly. Isaiah 65 includes beautiful imagery of this coming reality. Close your eyes and imagine the sort of world God promises he will recreate one day.

**For I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice forever
in what I am creating,
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy
and its people as a delight.
I will rejoice in Jerusalem
and delight in my people;
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in
it or the cry of distress.
No more shall there be in it
an infant who lives but a few days
or an old person who does not live out a
lifetime,
for one who dies at a hundred years will be
considered a youth,
and one who falls short of a hundred will be
considered accursed.
They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat,
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my
people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy
the work of their hands.
They shall not labor in vain**

**or bear children for calamity,
for they shall be offspring blessed by
the Lord—and their descendants as well.
Before they call I will answer,
while they are yet speaking I will hear.
The wolf and the lamb shall feed together;
the lion shall eat straw like the ox,
but the serpent—its food shall be dust!
They shall not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain,
says the Lord.⁷**

This is what Jesus is up to in our world, establishing this sort of kingdom. In fact, he teaches us to pray for this, for his kingdom to come, for his will on earth, in Sacramento, to be fulfilled as it is in heaven. And notice something. When we pay attention to the way Jesus went around proclaiming this good news, he did it with his words, but he also did it with his deeds.

It's such a travesty when, ever since, the church has so often separated these one from the other. In one wing of the church the tendency is to make the gospel all about words. Get somebody to pray a prayer and accept Jesus so they can insure that their soul will go to heaven one day. Then you move on to the next person who needs to also hear about Jesus and pray a similar prayer. All this while often ignoring the day to day material needs of those people you are "trying to get to heaven." At the other end of the church we too often make the equal but opposite error and limit the proclamation of the gospel to merely good deeds, hoping that as people are fed, and clothed, and educated, and liberated, that somehow they will come to trust Jesus even though nobody ever told them about Jesus.

The scriptures offer correctives on both counts. Scriptures like 1st John 3:17 correct the false idea that the gospel is mostly about words: "**How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?**" And scriptures like Romans 10:14 correct the false idea that the gospel is mostly about deeds: "**But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?**" Just look at the way Jesus proclaimed the coming Kingdom of God. He loved people with his words *and* he loved people with his deeds.

And guess what? He's still doing it. He never stopped. Which means the gospel still continues to change lives, even in the most unlikely of places. For example, in parts of the world today where people are more open-

⁵ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (Harper, 1997), 25.

⁶ Source unknown.

⁷ Isaiah 65:17-25

minded to the supernatural than we are in the scientifically-obsessed West, especially in places closed to the open sharing of Christianity, countless people are coming to trust Jesus through dreams and visions. The church is growing among Muslims in Iran as fast as it is growing anywhere in the world today. Christ is meeting people in the Muslim world in their dreams and visions, speaking scriptures to them they have never heard before, bringing peace and freedom, inviting them into his family.⁸ I have personally met people who have had this experience. In addition to that, I have heard from many different sources that in our own nation right now, there is an unexplained resurgence of young people, especially young men, who are turning to Christ in unexplainable numbers. I have also met people recently who have confirmed this, people who have been touched by the love of Christ in remarkable and unexpected ways.⁹ Jesus is still spending his days declaring the good news of the Kingdom!

And whenever Jesus proclaims the gospel in our world, he always does so out of the same motivation. Matthew captures it perfectly when he writes in verse 36, **“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”** Let me ask you, when you see crowds these days, is your instinctive reaction always compassion? What about a crowd of people storming the capital building in Washington? Or a crowd celebrating gay marriage? Or a crowd a country hostile to our nation burning an American flag? Or a crowd of the rich and famous? I’ll be honest with you, I can easily run short on compassion, depending on the crowd I’m looking at. Instead of compassion, I find other things welling up inside of me: resentment, jealousy, disgust, condemnation, even hatred on my worst days.

Not Jesus. And I don’t believe Jesus has compassion on just *some* crowds. I think he has compassion towards *all* crowds. I say this with confidence because when he was dying on the cross and looked out over the crowd that was seething with hatred for him, cheering on his suffering, this is what he prayed in that moment to his Father, **“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”**¹⁰ Jesus sees all lost people as sheep who, harassed and helpless, beat up and barely making it, have no idea how much they are loved and how much their creator has in store for them if they would just come home.

That word “compassion” in the original Greek is the word *spagchnizomai*. Doesn’t that sound like something your doctor may need to surgically remove? That’s because it is! It literally means “to have your bowels yearn.” The root of this word is a word that refers to a person’s inner organs, your guts.¹¹ In our day we might say that we ache for another person, or that we feel something in our bones. This word carries with it something similar. And when it’s used in the Gospels, it’s almost always tied to the ministry of Jesus. Jesus aches in his guts for the world, especially for the lost in this world, the people whose guts we can so easily hate. It speaks to one of the most often used descriptions of God’s heart in the Old Testament: **“The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.”**¹² The fact that this describes the very heart of God towards us all is truly good news!

The result of this compassion-fueled declaration of the good news of the Kingdom of God in our world by Jesus is that, according to Jesus, the harvest has now been made ripe. People respond. They did back then. They still do today. Beyond the doors of this building out into our city, and in faraway unlikely places like Iran, and everywhere in between, Christ is crying out over all lost people, “Mine!”. And many are responding. The harvest is ripe! But the reality is that even a ripe harvest can’t bring itself in. We are right in the middle of the grape harvest here in Northern California. All around us there are vineyards exploding with ripe fruit. But that fruit will never turn into wine unless thousands of workers are mobilized to go out into the fields and bring those ripe grapes in.

I couldn’t help but think of that story of the Ethiopian man in Acts 8. Here is this foreigner riding in his chariot after worshipping at the Temple in Jerusalem, and as he heads back home he’s reading through the prophesy of Isaiah. His heart is open. He’s seeking the true God. The fruit is ripening on the vine. And so the Lord sends a worker named Philip to go harvest the fruit. Philip is sent to walk beside this man’s chariot and ask him if he understands what he is reading. The man’s answer is telling: **“How can I, unless someone guides me?”**¹³ So Philip does just that. He guides him, and reaps a harvest God made ripe. Before the story is over, the man is being baptized in a nearby stream. God made the fruit ripe, then sent Philip out to bring it in.

⁸ Darren Carlson, “When Muslims Dream of Jesus,” *The Gospel Coalition*, May 31, 2018. Read online at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/muslims-dream-jesus/>

⁹ Read one recent description from J.T. Reeves, “Why Young Men are Coming Back to Church,” *The Gospel Coalition*, September 24, 2025.

Read online at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/young-men-coming-back-church/>

¹⁰ Luke 22:34

¹¹ <https://biblehub.com/greek/4697.htm>

¹² Exodus 34:6

¹³ Acts 8:31

Here's a long-standing problem in the American church. We don't typically go out to the fields to bring in ripe fruit. We expect the ripe fruit to come in to us. I call it the "Field of Dreams" approach to evangelism: "Build it and they will come." We create something wonderful on a campus like this, and then we wait for people to come to us. If and when they do, we welcome them, include them, teach them, help them, even make them a part of our family. And that used to work when people were showing up at churches en masse. It doesn't work so well anymore. It actually hasn't worked for a long time. Still, I believe there are many people who, at the prompting of Christ, are out in the world sincerely seeking the freedom and hope only Christ has to offer and, at the same time, asking, "How can I find what I'm looking for unless someone comes and guides me?"

So what is it that Jesus wants of us? He wants us to go. We are not responsible for making a harvest ripe. That's God's job. Thank God that's God's job! We are simply called to go and harvest what he has already made ripe. As commentator Dale Bruner puts it, "[The harvest] is a work almost finished, a work done mainly by Another, in which workers have the relatively uncomplicated task of merely gathering in work already done."¹⁴ Never imagine that it is your job to convert even one other person to the Christian faith. That's not your job. Conversion is God's job alone. Our job is simply to go and meet people God is drawing to himself.

But notice that before we go, Jesus tells us to do something else first. What is it? He tells us to pray. **"Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."** Not only is Christ in charge of ripening the harvest, he's also in charge of sending out workers to bring it in. I love how an author named Randy Newman, in his book *Questioning Evangelism*, outlines the content of such a prayer. In his view, when we obey Jesus' command here to pray, we pray for three things.¹⁵

First, we pray for forgiveness. We confess to God that we are a lot more like Jonah than we'd like to admit. Remember Jonah? God told him to go and harvest a people called the Ninevites whom God had made ripe because God's gut ached for Nineveh. But Jonah absolutely did not want to go because he hated that crowd. In the end, it took a whale to get him there. Many of us are too much like Jonah, and so we need to begin our prayers with honest repentance, praying, "Lord, I don't tend to care about certain people in this

world the way you do, and the way I should. This is especially true of people who don't think like me, look like me, act like me, believe like me, vote like me, worship like me, or like me in the first place. My heart is cold toward them. I have no excuse. All I have is my honest confession."

Second, we then pray for compassion, *splagchnizomai* compassion, compassion that moves us to go like it moved Jesus to go. Proverbs 14:12 wisely declares, **"There is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the way to death."** The last part of that verse is often quoted by Christians. And it's true. Many people have chosen a pathway in life that will lead to death. But we forget the first part of the verse. People choose such a pathway because *it seems right to them*. As Newman puts it, Buddhism *seems right* to some because it acknowledges an oft-neglected spiritual dimension of life. Islam *seems right* to some because it calls for an uncompromising moral purity in a world that has become increasingly immoral. Rejecting the church and Christianity *seems right* to some, especially to those who grew up in so-called Christian communities dominated by harsh legalism and blatant hypocrisy.

I heard it put this way this week, "When you wash somebody's feet, you find out why they walk the way they do."¹⁶ In other words, when you serve and come to know a person you begin to understand why what they believe seems right to them. It would seem right to you also if you had walked in their shoes! And so our prayer moves from confession of sin to a plea for empathy: "Lord, make me more like you. Give me a compassion for the lost in this world that I can feel in my gut."

Finally, we then pray for people, actual people, some we know and some we will never know. We pray for those who do not yet know the love and grace of Christ. We pray that they might have their hearts opened, even broken, so that God's love and grace would flood in and transform them. We pray for the good news of the Kingdom of God to become real to them. This doesn't mean that God needs our prayers to do this work. He doesn't. But as we pray for the Kingdom to come in this way, for the name of God to be hallowed in all the world as he taught us to pray it would be, our hearts become increasingly aligned with Christ in ways that help us then align our lives with the life of Christ. Part of this, of course, is praying for individuals we know personally. And part of this is praying for whole nations and cultures, our own and those we will never visit.¹⁷

¹⁴ Fredrick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary*, Volume 1 (Eerdmans Publishing, 2001), 450.

¹⁵ Randy Newman, *Questioning Evangelism* (Kregel Publishing, 2004), 221-225. This is a wonderful book which has, for many people, reframed the concept of evangelism in our day.

¹⁶ Source unknown.

¹⁷ Paul modeled both of these prayers in Acts 10:1, when he prayed for an entire nation, and in Acts 26:29, when he prayed for a specific individual.

We pray for forgiveness. We pray for compassion. We pray for people. I think this is a good agenda to adopt when we pray as Jesus commands us here to pray. But as we do, we should be forewarned. These are dangerous prayers, because likely the Lord of the Harvest will answer these prayers in and through the ones who pray them. That means that we will likely be the ones who are sent out. And “sent out” is a gentle way to put it. The word here literally means “thrust out”. It’s the same Greek word that the Gospel writers used when Jesus cast out the merchants in the temple with a whip¹⁸, or when he drove out demons.¹⁹ The word “exorcism” is related to this word.²⁰ So when we pray this way we should be prepared to see the Lord of the Harvest answer our prayers by thrusting us out into the harvest.

Last week Kimberly preached a timely and poignant message on Jesus’ teaching on salt and light in Matthew 5.²¹ Jesus tells us, the church, that we *are* salt, and that we *are* light. The thing about both salt and light is that on their own they are not good for much. Salt shows its worth when it enhances the flavor in food, or when it preserves food from rotting. Light shows its worth when it illuminates something else. The same could be said of the church, that we show our worth when we impact those beyond us. In fact, the church may be the only organization in the history of the world that exists primarily for the sake of its non-members.

The very mission statement of our own congregation makes this clear: *Faith Presbyterian Church is a community loving Christ, building disciples, serving all.* Do you see the movement? We love Jesus, worship him with our whole lives in response to what he has done for us. We help one another then grow as his disciples, by the grace of God increasingly living our lives as Jesus would live his life if he were in our shoes. And then we are sent out to serve all, at least whoever the Lord puts in our path. As writer Robert Mulholland rightly puts it, “[Spiritual formation] is a process of being formed in the image of Christ *for the sake of others.*”²² The end goal is to be sent out.

We are going to spend the next six weeks in the next chapter of Matthew, chapter 10. You see, Jesus doesn’t just tell his followers to pray for workers to go out into the ripe harvest, he then spends the whole next chapter teaching such followers what that will look like when we are sent out. I’ve come to see Matthew 10 as our blueprint for how to go out, and honestly six weeks might not be enough time to cover all that is covered here. This is timely for us, because many in our

leadership here at Faith, along with many of you, are increasingly sensing the Holy Spirit calling us to go out into the harvest. And I love it that I get to serve a congregation so willing to go when and where we are sent. Sometimes I think the our main hang-up is that we aren’t quite sure what to do when we go, or where to go in the first place. And that’s where I believe Jesus’ teaching here can be, will be, enormously helpful. As I said earlier, the hard work is mostly done. Our job, our mission, is simply to obey and go and do the relatively uncomplicated work of gathering in what has already been made ripe.

But before we go, we must pray.

Amen

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The Next Step

A resource for Life Groups and/or personal application

1. Read Matthew 9:35-38 again. What do you notice here? What stands out to you? What questions are raised?
2. Matthew tells us that Jesus proclaimed the “good news of the kingdom” to the crowds. What is that good news? How do you define the gospel?
3. When you think about sharing the gospel out in the world, do you think about speaking words or doing deeds? What’s your tendency/preference? And do you agree that it must be both?
4. Do you have compassion on lost crowds in our day? Why or why not?
5. Jesus declared in his day that the fields were ripe. What do you think he meant by this? Do you think the fields in our day are just as ripe? Why or why not?
6. Do you see yourself as a laborer sent out by the Lord of the Harvest to reach those who are lost in this world? Why or why not?
7. If Faith Presbyterian Church were to go out into the harvest, what do you imagine that would look like? Where would we go? How would we go? Use your imagination.

¹⁸ Mark 11:15

¹⁹ Matthew 8:16

²⁰ <https://biblehub.com/greek/1544.htm>

²¹ From Matthew 5:13-16

²² Robert Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey* (InterVarsity Press, 2016), 19.

8. Are you willing to pray as Jesus commands us to pray here, for laborers to be sent? Are you willing to pray for forgiveness, for compassion, and for people? As you pray, are you ready to become the answer to your prayers?

Table to Table: For kids and adults to consider together.



Talk as a family about committing to pray as Jesus teaches us here to pray. What would that look like? Could you pray for forgiveness, for compassion, for people?