

The Compassion Of Jesus Matthew 9:35-38

Two liberal sociologists were walking down the street when they saw a man lying unconscious and covered with cuts and bruises from a terrible mugging. One of the sociologists turned to his colleague and said, "Whoever did this terrible deed really needs our help."

One day Snoopy was sitting outside in the middle of a snowstorm shivering from the cold. Linus and Charlie Brown happened by and saw Snoopy in his condition. Looking at each other they decided to go and cheer him up. They told Snoopy to "Be of good cheer!" and then they walked away leaving Snoopy in the same condition they found him, satisfied that they had cheered him up.

On May 16, 1998, 15-year-old Christopher Sercye was playing basketball with his friends when he was shot twice in the stomach. His friends rushed him to the nearby hospital getting him to within 40 feet of the entrance of Ravenswood Hospital. One of his friends rushed inside to get help but the hospital staff refused because it was against hospital policy to administer aid to those outside the hospital. Eventually policemen got a gurney and rushed him inside where he could be helped by the medical staff. But it was too late as he died an hour later.

Sometimes we are like the two sociologists and fail to see the immediate need.

At other times we are like Linus and Charlie Brown thinking that cheering someone up is all they need when we really haven't done anything to help them in their difficulty.

Many times, it seems that churches are surrounded by people who desperately need to hear the Gospel, yet Christians are content to share it only with those who manage to come inside the church. Somehow, we have gotten the idea that evangelism is only about teaching and preaching. But Jesus shows us that it is much more than that. By healing people, Jesus demonstrated His compassion by actual works. His words were backed up by His actions.

Beginning today and for the next number of weeks it is my intention to consider some of the characteristics of Jesus. **What was He like as a person?** I want us to get a glimpse of Jesus with the hope and prayer that we might emulate His character. Today we begin with compassion. Turn with me in your Bibles to **Matthew 9:35-38**.

Someone has said that compassion can't be measured in dollars or cents, but it does come with a price tag. That tag isn't the amount of money spent. The price tag is the love shown.

The dictionary defines compassion as sorrow or pity caused by the suffering or misfortune of another. Both the Hebrew and Greek understanding of the word support the same. The word comes from a Latin word that literally means to suffer together. It relates to other words like sympathy and empathy, but we need to understand that there are some key differences. Where empathy refers more to the general ability to take another person's perspective and feel the same emotions, compassion not only feels the person's pain, but they also want to take steps to do something to relieve the suffering. Compassion sees and acts. That is the example Jesus sets for us. **Isaiah 53:3** describes the coming Messiah as a man of sorrows who would be acquainted with our grief. **Hebrews 4:15** tells us that Jesus was touched with the feelings of our infirmities. **So what does our passage say about the compassion of Jesus and how does it challenge us to be compassionate?** From **verse 35**, let's consider first the commission of Jesus.

I. THE COMMISSION OF JESUS – v. 35

We are told in **Psalm 86:15** that God is **"a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness."**

Similarly, we read in **Lamentations 3:22-23** that His compassions never fail, and that they are new every morning because of His great faithfulness.

Since God the Father and God the Son have the same attributes, what is true of the Father about His compassion is also true of the Son, Jesus.

His compassion is both great and unchanging. From our passage Jesus teaches us how to look at others, how to feel about what we see, and how we are to act. It's the where, what, and why. As we look at **verse 35**, we note first the places Jesus traveled to.

A. The Places Jesus Traveled To – v. 35a

Jesus is on a ministry tour and scholars note that this is His second trip around the region of Galilee. This was the place of His home base and ministry. Under Roman rule, Israel was divided into three smaller regions. Judea was in the south, Samaria was in the central hill country, and Galilee was in the north. Jewish historian Josephus describes Galilee as about 40 miles wide and 70 miles long with some 200 villages and cities. He estimated that there were approximately three million people. Its cities were walled but the villages were open.

So when Scripture says that He went through all the towns and villages, I take it to mean that He visited each one. **But what did He do when He stopped at those locations?** Our passage tells us He went to the synagogues.

We learn from our Old Testament history that when Babylon ransacked Jerusalem and carried the youngest and brightest off to Babylon to teach them the language and customs, the Babylonian army left in its wake a destroyed Jerusalem. They tore down the walls and burned many of the buildings including the Temple. That meant the Jews couldn't go to the Temple to offer sacrifices and worship. To continue some semblance of worship during those 70 years of captivity, they erected synagogues in towns. They were local places to meet.

The word synagogue means place of assembly. According to the regulations enacted by the Jews, to open a synagogue in a town or village required at least 10 Jewish men. It was usually located on a hill or by a river. The construction was usually roofless so that they could look up at heaven during their worship. A person visiting the town or village for the first time could immediately identify where the synagogue was located because it had a long pole that stuck up in the air, much like you might see a

steeple on many churches today.

The synagogue was the center of community life. Not only was it the place for worship, it also served as the town hall and the courthouse. Every week they would gather on the Sabbath as well as the second and fifth days of the week. They also met to celebrate festivals and feasts. It served as a school and seminary for instruction in the Talmud, which was the official commentary of the law of Moses.

Sabbath worship included the reading of Scripture followed by an exposition of the passage read. This could be done by any qualified man such as a priest, teacher, or Rabbi. In **Luke 4** beginning at **verse 14** we read that Jesus went to the synagogue on the Sabbath. It says He stood up to read and the scroll containing the book of Isaiah was handed to Him. He unrolled it until He found the passage He wanted to read what we have in our Bibles as **Isaiah 61:1-2: "The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor, He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."**

After Jesus read that passage, He rolled it back up, sat down and gave a brief exposition stating that the prophecy He just read was fulfilled in their hearing, referring to Himself as the fulfillment.

Jesus traveled to all the towns and villages and visited their synagogues. Those were the places He went to. That's the where. The next part of the verse tells us why He went there and what He did. It's the preaching Jesus taught about.

B. The Preaching Jesus Taught About – v. 35b

Jesus taught or preached the good news of the kingdom. The basic meaning is to herald a message or make a public announcement for everyone to hear. We picture the old days when the town crier would stand on a corner and announce "here ye, here ye." and then proceed with the message.

In this case, Jesus taught the good news of the kingdom, that being the place or realm where God

rules. As we read the New Testament, we understand this kingdom to be the rule of Christ in the hearts of believers. From **John 18:36** we understand that His kingdom is not of this world. Now we can take that to mean His kingdom rule that is yet to come during His 1000-year reign on earth in what we call His millennial kingdom or we can take it to mean His rule in heaven for eternity. But in the context of the passage, I think that the gospel of the kingdom He is speaking of here is His rule in the heart of believers who have trusted Him as Savior.

Mark 1:14-15 gives us an accurate depiction of His primary focus during His ministry on earth: **“Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’”**

In writing to the church in Rome, Paul stated that this kingdom is a matter **“of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 14:17)** In other words, the gospel of the kingdom is the good news of repentance, redemption, and restoration that God offers to anyone who receives Christ as Savior by faith. At that moment they become part of God’s family and kingdom.

John 1:12 “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the sons of God, even to them who believe on His name.”

Anyone who chooses to remain in their sin and not accept this gift of God will not be part of this kingdom. The gospel of the kingdom is the good news that by becoming part of this kingdom we have been freed from the kingdom of slavery to sin. This happens through repentance as we turn to God **(Romans 6:18-19)**. We then become citizens of this kingdom pledging our allegiance to God, we choose to obey His commands instead of conforming to this world’s habits, values, and lifestyle because this is not our home. As the old spiritual hymn goes

“This world is not my home,

I’m just a passin’ through.

Romans 12:1-2

The gospel of the kingdom Jesus taught changes us

and challenges us to live in obedience to Him while we live in a foreign land which opposes His kingdom. If we have a proper kingdom mindset, it also challenges us to further that kingdom by sharing the same good news with others so that they too can become part of His kingdom.

So in **Matthew 11:28-30** when Jesus invites those who are burdened and heavy laden to come to Him, it is an invitation to find rest for our souls, to become part of the kingdom He was proclaiming. That is a part of the compassion He has for everyone that we will get to in a moment.

When He went into the towns and villages, Jesus tells us what He taught about. The last part of the verse tells us the practice Jesus toiled at.

C. The Practice Jesus Toiled At – v. 35c

Remember, Jesus’s primary focus was on preaching the good news of the kingdom. To substantiate what He taught and who He was, He did so through miracles. Miracles were a way of proving He was the Son of God with the authority to teach His message of repentance and the Kingdom.

If what Josephus says is true and there were three million people in Galilee, you can well imagine the large crowds that would have dropped what they were doing when they heard Jesus was in town. Scholars believe that when Jesus fed the five thousand there could have been over 20,000 people hearing Him teach and then witnessing the miracle of feeding all those people. The lame, the maimed, the deaf, the blind, and the diseased all came to Him to be healed and our verse says He healed everyone who came to Him.

Read through the Gospels and you see time after time where Jesus healed people. Whether it was a deformity like a withered hand, a disease like leprosy, a defect from birth like deafness or blindness, or a 12-year bleeding issue, He healed as a way of authenticating Himself and His message.

That is the commission of Jesus we see in **verse 35**. Next, we see in **verse 36** the compassion of Jesus.

II. THE COMPASSION OF JESUS v. 36

“When He saw the crowd...”

We saw in **verse 35** the where and the what. In this verse we see the why. Jesus had compassion. Notice first, Jesus’s consideration of the crowd.

A. Jesus’s Consideration Of The Crowd – v. 36a

The word **“saw”** is circled in my study Bible.

I have been to many sporting events from High school to college to professional games. I’ve been in Grand Central Station in New York City, walked among the mass of people along 5th Ave., and stood in long lines waiting to get on some roller coaster at Cedar Point. In that sea of humanity, it’s easy to only see people as one big mass.

When driving on a road or hiking on a trail through some forest we often miss the trees because of the forest. They all look the same. Jesus is teaching us to look at the trees among the forest, to see people as individuals in a crowd of people. He looked at them and saw their needs. But He looked beyond the physical needs they had for which they came to be healed. He saw deep into their hearts. He saw the lostness of their soul and the blackness of their sin.

The word **“saw”** is more than just having something or someone in our vision. We go on vacation and talk about sightseeing. Several years ago we went to Washington D.C. on vacation and took in all the historical monuments. We visited museums and browsed through all the displays. But Jesus has in mind something different than just noticing people. What Matthew says is that Jesus perceived them and the real needs He knew they had. He had an awareness, an understanding, a discernment of their real need. He looked on them through the lens of His purpose in coming to earth in the first place: to seek and save the lost. He had an accurate consideration of those He saw which led to His concern for the crowd.

B. Jesus’s Concern For The Crowd – v. 36b

As He saw the crowd, He saw what they truly were and what their need was.

I like the KJV here because it says He was **“moved”** with compassion. He didn’t remain untouched by what He saw. He wasn’t like the two religious leaders in the story of the good Samaritan who saw the man beaten and lying in a ditch unmoved to do anything. At the core of His being Jesus was moved by what He saw when He looked at the people. The word compassion suggests deep feeling, a groaning inside by what you see. We hear testimony of people who have visited the slum areas of third world countries and report how what they saw brought tears to their eyes from all the people living in abject poverty, rummaging through trash for food, drinking water that we wouldn’t give our pets, wearing nothing but rags on their body and pieces of an old tire or a plastic bottle made into makeshift shoes.

When I see people, am I moved by what I see?
Lord, give me a heart of compassion.

Nineteenth Century pastor Alexander MacLaren wrote **“If a man does not respond to something, some crust of callousness comes over his own heart...beware of sentimental contemplation of the sad condition of the shepherdless sheep which does not move you to do anything to help them.”**

To have an outward look, we need to have an inward longing. We must have the heart and humility of Christ if we are to see others and be moved with His same compassion. Remember that our definition of compassion is more than just a feeling of sympathy. Compassion acts on what it sees. Moved with compassion Jesus did something about their need. He not only healed them of their illnesses and diseases, but in time He would do something about their greatest need, the need for a Savior by dying on the cross for their sin.

Pastor and evangelist D. L. Moody tells the story of his conversion while living in Boston. He attended a Sunday school class in a local church. One day as he was behind the counter of the shoe shop where he worked, the Sunday school teacher came around the counter and put his hand on Moody’s shoulder and talked to him about Christ and Moody’s need of a Savior. He said to himself that it seemed quite

strange that a man he only met recently came in to talk to him and weep over his soul and about his sins. Moody recalls never giving much thought to his sin before let alone weeping over them, but here was this man doing just that. He showed compassion for his need. Moody recalls not remembering what the man said but felt power in the man's hand on his shoulder. The genuine compassion over the concern for his spiritual soul resulted in his salvation.

Psalm 126:5-6 “Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying their sheaves with them.”

Pray that we might have the same compassion when we see the crowds, seeing their brokenness, seeing their great need for salvation. **How often do we weep with compassion over those without Christ?**

Why did Jesus have compassion for the crowd? In the remainder of **verse 36** we see His conclusion about the crowd.

C. Jesus's Conclusion About The Crowd – 36c

Some have described sheep as the dumbest animal around. They are unable to help themselves, they have no natural defense against attack. Jesus describes the people He saw to be like sheep. They were harassed or the word faint in the KJV. Weary, tired, leaderless with no protection or guidance, troubled. The religious leaders provided no spiritual protection or guidance for the spiritual needs of these people. Those who were supposed to shepherd them were instead keeping them from following the real shepherd and entering the kingdom of God.

Greek scholar A. T. Robertson defines the word fainted or harassed to be mangled as by wild beasts. In other words, they were in danger.

Jesus saw them as scattered abroad, a word that means to cast or be thrown down. If was used to describe someone who was cast down either by drunkenness or from a mortal wound. The word can implies being lost, lonely, aimless, defenseless, hopeless, and helpless. Get a mental picture of

someone who is just wandering around because they don't know where to go or what to do. Look at the crowds around and see them as Jesus did, helpless without anyone guiding them.

Let's not be afraid to see people as Jesus did.
Let's not be afraid to feel for people as Jesus did.
Let's not be afraid to act in response to what we see about the needs of people as Jesus did.

It may require that we step in and help meet a tangible need in order to help meet their spiritual need. You have heard it said that people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

Do we have the compassion of Jesus?

We need to consider the crowd.

We need to be concerned about the crowd.

Let the concern we see about the crowd help us come to the right conclusion about the needs of the crowd, which brings us to the compulsion of Jesus.

III. THE COMPULSION OF JESUS – vv. 37-38

Speaking to His disciples, Jesus states that the challenge is clear.

A. The Challenge By Jesus Is Clear – v. 37

The metaphor is clear. The crowds were like a crop ready to be harvested. The harvest was ready, but there were not enough laborers to bring in the harvest. More were needed. These laborers needed to have the same heart for the harvest as Jesus did.

Think for a moment about the billions of people in the world, many who have never heard the gospel. John Phillips is right in declaring that **“untold millions are still untold.”** Thousands of people groups still have no portion of Scripture in their own language. Many others only have a small portion of Scripture. That's why people like Cassy Fleming are working to translate Scripture for people to hear about Jesus for the first time and then help them grow in faith.

Jesus says that more workers are needed because there are so few doing the work. Moved with

compassion, Jesus brought the need to the attention of the disciples. They also needed to be concerned about the great need for more workers. To Jesus, the challenge is clear, which brings us to the last verse where the charge by Jesus is compelling.

B. The Charge By Jesus Is Compelling – v. 38

He doesn't just point to the need; He asks them to be part of the solution. Remember that compassion means more than just seeing a need, it is being moved to do something about it. He told the disciples to pray for more workers to go into the harvest.

Again, from the pen of A.T. Robertson who writes "How seldom do we hear prayers for more preachers. Sometimes God has to push or force a man into ministry who resists his known duty."

But this isn't just a prayer for more pastors or missionaries. It is a compelling charge for each of us to see the fields of people ready for harvesting. It is prayer for our own willingness to go and be part of the solution through compassion.

Warren Wiersbe states that "when we pray as He commands, we will see what He saw, feel what He felt, and do what He did. God will multiply our lives as we share in the great harvest that is already ripe."

While we must pray for workers, we must be open to being the someone we are praying for who will go. We must be at His disposal. We are the successors of the disciples tasked with praying for workers but who are also willing to share the gospel of the kingdom.

You may remember this song from the 60's:

Lonely voices crying in the city,
Lonely voices sounding like a child.
Lonely voices come from busy people;
Too disturbed to stop a little while.
Lonely voices fill my dreams;
Lonely voices haunt my memory.

Lonely faces looking for the sunrise
Just to find another busy day.

Lonely faces all around the city;
Men afraid but too ashamed to pray.
Lonely faces do I see;
Lonely faces haunt my memory.

Lonely eyes--I see them in the subway;
Burdened by the worries of the day.
Men at leisure, but they're so unhappy;
Tired of foolish roles they try to play.
Lonely people do I see;
Lonely people haunt my memory.

Abundant life He came to truly give man;
But so few His gift of grace receive.
Lonely people live in every city;
Men who face a dark and lonely grave.
Lonely faces do I see;
Lonely voices calling out to me.

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When Jesus looked at the crowd, He was moved with compassion. He challenged the disciples to pray for more workers to go into the harvest.

Do we have the compassion of Jesus?

Let's see with the eyes of Jesus.
Let's feel with the heart of Jesus.
Let's act with hands and feet of Jesus.

When we have compassion, we will let go of being judgmental or critical and look to how we can help others, to see their real need, one that is spiritual. Let's make sure we're seeing the crowds as Jesus did.

An old unknown author wrote:
Let me look on the crowd as my Savior did,
Till my eyes with tears grow dim;
Let me view with pity the wandering sheep,
And love them for the love of Him.