**Sunday, October 25, 2020**

**Matthew 9:35-10:15 (On Mission)**

**Pastor Eric Dubois**

**Intro**

This morning we consider Jesus’ compassion for sinners and the mission he’s given to us.

I’ll confess this is a struggle for me like I assume it is with you. Sermons aren’t just for you. There’s grief and frustration. With some people I invested heavily in them. I spent time with them. I took interest in their lives. I shared the gospel as skillfully as I could. I lived a changed life. I thought they were going to come around. But they never did.

And there’s guilt. People came to me with questions. And I never made use of the opportunity. I assumed they’re never going to believe so why bother. I worked with people in desperate situations with no hope. I possessed the hope of the gospel. Sure they were antagonistic and mocking. But they were a hurting and confused and desperate people. There were glimpses of openness. But I did little in terms of direct gospel conversation. I assumed they’re never going to believe so why bother. It wasn’t so much fear of confrontation. It was doubt that sinners could repent and believe. Experience, not Scripture, informed my actions.

Like you, I’m a learner. Failure leads to confession, forgiveness, refocus, and divine enablement. We start the Christian life with faith and repentance. We continue how we started: with faith and repentance.

Let’s see what Jesus had to say to his early followers about mission…

**READ PASSAGE**

**PRAY**

**Body**

**Passage Focus**

Jesus’ compassion prompts him to send his people to lost people.

**Point 1: Cultivate compassion for sinners (9:35-38)**

**Kingdom**

● gospel of the kingdom = the good news that God’s reign had arrived with Jesus’ coming

● The kingdom is already: the powers of the age to come (Heb 6:5) arrived with Jesus.

● The kingdom is not yet: Jesus will return to usher in an eternal kingdom where the fall is undone (Matt 25:31-46; 26:29).

Jesus went out. He didn’t isolate.

→ as Jesus engaged the people, what did he find?

**What Jesus found**

● “*because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”* = weary, troubled and thrown down with no one to lift them up and care for them

Shepherds were responsible for the survival and welfare of their sheep. They ensured their sheep were fed, sheltered, protected from harm, and cared for their injuries. And they cared for their sheep one-by-one, ensuring each individual sheep made it into the protective fold at night.

● scribes and Pharisees = unnecessary burdens and keeping people from kingdom (Matt 23:4, 13-15).

● imagine the burden of works religion = told to do what you can’t…no peace of sins forgiven

● kept from the truth that would provide divine enablement and peace with God

**Compassion**

● the hungry

● a leper

● the blind

● the demon-possessed

● the mother of a dead child

● parables: master’s compassion for indebted servant, Good Samaritan’s compassion, father’s compassion for a prodigal son

It’s pity, sympathy, grief over the miserable situation a fellow human is in. Compassion reaches our heart and results in action. The Good Samaritan attends to the man’s wounds, pays for his stay at an inn, and ensures ongoing care is provided. Jesus healed the afflicted, raised the dead, and cast out demons.

Instead of looking down on the harassed and helpless, “they’re sinners…they’re getting what they deserve…it was their choices that got them there,” we need compassion. Have mercy on sinners like Jesus had mercy on us.

**Dad illustration**

Movie theatre → right before New Year’s/Sugarloaf → wallet lost with $150 → knew what I was going to do with the money → gave me money anyways → was it the right thing? → maybe God spoke to him?

**Examples:**

● A single mother

● a drug addict

● the futility of works righteousness

● a person enslaved to false teaching

Let’s consider a single mother with young children and a father that isn’t in the picture. Say she was divorced. Say she contributed to the divorce in the way she treated her husband. Let’s think of a person who contributed to their own distress. But now she has to do the work of two people on her own. She doesn’t have a husband to help out when she’s exhausted. Finances are tight. There’s a sense of regret and failure. There’s fear that no man will want a woman in her situation. The children suffer without a father in the home.

What does compassion feel here? → fall’s effects = mercy for sins committed and sins against

The deacons organize a time for the church to help with house repair. Some with excess income provide wood for heat. The women invite her to a Bible study while providing child care. A family takes the kids for an afternoon to give her a break. Men in the church disciple her boys. A lady in the church disciples her when a man enters the picture. The church alleviates real needs while providing gospel hope: past sins can be forgiven. Sinful patterns can be replaced.

● Compassion ≠ affirming sin or embracing false teaching…seeing someone’s plight and coming to their aid…Jesus was concerned with their spiritual plight

**Optimism**

→ did you notice Jesus’ optimism in the passage?

*"The harvest is plentiful"*

Some will respond. Envisioning gospel mission to the Gentiles, Jesus said:

**John 10:16**  And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

One reason we don’t go. One reason we isolate, is pessimism.

**Go because of compassion**

*therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."*

● plight = someone needs to go

● desperate people = pray for laborers

This was a call to one’s countrymen, not the distant natives on the other side of the globe. Like a call to Waldo and Kennebec county.

→ why don’t we go?

1. Pessimism
2. What if I make a fool of myself?

● can’t answer a question, science, problem of evil, long lives

● focus on self not the plight of the lost

1. What if they get upset with me?

● no one wants to hear about hell, no one wants to hear that they’re not good

● focus on self not the plight of the lost

**Point 2: Search out receptive ears (10:1-15)**

**Explanation**

Twelve of the disciples who prayed become the answer to their prayers. They’re called the 12 apostles…

**Apostles**

1. The apostles were the 12, Matthias (Acts 1:21-26), Paul, Barnabas (Acts 14:14; 1 Cor 9:5-6), James (Gal 1:19), and perhaps others
2. They saw the risen Christ (1 Cor 9:1)
3. They were personally appointed by Christ (Acts 26:16-18; Rom 1:1)
4. They performed signs and wonders (2 Cor 12:12)
5. They possessed authority in the early church = authority over congregations and wrote Scripture
6. Apostolic authority was transferred to local churches with elder leadership (Titus 1:5)
7. Big A apostles don’t exist anymore = beware of anyone today who claims to be an apostle and have the same authority Paul possessed
8. An apostolic gift existed (1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11) which suggests small a apostles may exist today in a church planting or pioneer missions gift (but calling oneself an apostle evokes images of pride and grasps for power so it should be avoided)

**Authority Given**

The apostles were given authority over every disease, every affliction, and demons. This authority was exclusively given to 12 specific people for a specific mission. If we had this authority, there would be no sick among us. Either we’re disobedient or we don’t have this authority. I’ll let you go to the hospital and try it out.

As for demons, this authority was for the 12 and a particular mission. We would only cast demons out of unbelievers (e.g., physical ailment or destructive behavior). Primary rescue come through repentance and faith. But if demons refuse to come out, there’s no guarantee we can just cast them out. We would need God’s immediate help because we don’t have this authority.

**The lost sheep of Israel**

→ where are we at in salvation history?

1. Gentile salvation was a future reality in the OT
2. Great commission occurs after the resurrection

**John 12:32**  And I, when I am lifted up [crucified] from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

1. Jesus came to establish the church
2. The church, not Jesus, would bring the gospel to the nations
3. Glimpses of ministry to Gentiles and Samaritans in Jesus’ life (centurion, woman at the well)

**Motivations**

1. Don’t seek payment → *You received without paying; give without pay.*
2. Trust in God to provide your needs (presumably through those who embrace the message) → *Acquire no gold nor silver nor copper for your belts, 10 no bag for your journey, nor two tunics nor sandals nor a staff, for the laborer deserves his food.*

**The Mission (= finding receptive hearers)**

● Seek out receptive ears → *And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart. 12 As you enter the house, greet it. 13 And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you.*

● assumption is some will respond well = optimism

**Don’t get discouraged**

● Move on from those who reject the message → *And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. 15 Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.*

You’re not responsible for the response. It’s not how to secure a response. It’s what to do when negative responses occur. Optimism and pessimism are both present.

Those caveats aside, like the apostles we’re called to share the gospel message and seek out a receptive audience. How should we look for a receptive audience? Send out feelers. When someone asks you how your **weekend** went, tell them about what you did Sunday morning. When someone asks about what you do for **fun**, tell them about the ways you serve in the church. If they ask follow-up questions, you may have receptive person. If they quickly change the subject, you may have to shake the dust off your feet. Ask people questions about their **religious background**. If they give a short non-answer with resentment they may not be open. If they tell you their whole story they may be open. A bold question would be, **“have you ever heard the Christian gospel?”** That could lead in a variety of questions and give you a feel for their openness to discuss spiritual matters. If someone knows you’re a Christian and brings questions out of the blue, you may have a receptive person.

What if it’s clear someone doesn’t want to talk about religion? Or what if you’ve already shared enough, they get the point, and they don’t care? You’ve done your part. Don’t feel guilty or like a failure. Maintain a presence in their life if possible. Spend time with them without pestering them. Be a good friend or good family member. Pray for God to open their heart to the gospel. Be salt and light that commends the gospel. If they bring it up, wisely communicate gospel truths in a winsome way.

**A Plan for Outreach?**

1. Inviting people into your homes, into small groups, to Sunday morning services = relationships and **gospel conversations** (God → Man → Christ → Response)

● you have connections I don’t

● encourage you to set up meetings where I can talk with your spouse, grandchild, or neighbor

● God works through his Word and our relationships

● this is how God converts sinners (conversion growth versus transfer growth)

1. Strategic contact

● youth group, Good News club, basketball, gym walking, clothes closet, coaching baseball

1. Strategic encounters

● VBS, Thanksgiving dinner, Journey

**To Unbelievers**

Do you find yourself harassed and helpless? Trying to convince yourself you’re good despite evidence to the contrary. Trying to convince yourself you can overcome your struggles only to realize you don’t have it in you. Have you found doing life in your own strength wanting? Until we find Jesus we’re sheep without a shepherd. Jesus offers complete and final pardon. Jesus provides strength to do what he commands when we come in faith and repentance.

**Conclusion**

God calls us to be faithful. He doesn’t call us to secure results. Sure faithfulness should naturally lead to fruit, but our faithfulness can’t guarantee the desired outcome. We keep going when we encounter rejection.

My hesitation in sharing stemmed from my pessimism. Why engage in gospel conversations if everyone’s going to reject the message? I believed Satanic lies that evangelism is fruitless. Pessimism dominated compassion. My focus should have been the **plight** of my co-workers. They were without hope in the world. They were deceived and enslaved to sin. The wrath of God was hanging over them. **Cultivate compassion for sinners.**

Optimism was sadly lacking. I should have remembered that God has sheep scattered abroad that haven’t come into the fold yet (John 10:16). I should have believed that the gospel is powerful to convert sinners (Jas 1:18). I should have confessed my unbiblical thoughts. I should have sought God’s help to overcome doubt. **Search out receptive ears.**

Engaging leads to compassion. Compassion leads to gospel conversations. Gospel conversations reveal receptive ears.