

Matthew 9:35-38 | “The Compassionate Christ”
Preached on August 20, 2023 by Pastor Matt Brown

Well it’s good to be back in the pulpit, as we continue in Matthew 9, verses 35-38 today.

And this morning we are going to be learning about our compassionate Christ. [pauseeee]

Did you know that there’s such a thing as compassion fatigue?

According to Psychology Today, “compassion fatigue refers to the experience of any empathetic individual who is acutely conscious of societal needs but feels helpless to solve them.”¹ [pause]

What happens is that because we are so immediately connected with the news of the world, we become bombarded with stories of disaster and suffering.

I think of how quickly we all found out about the wildfires in Hawaii, or if a shooting happens, we know about it right away. [pause]

So because we are constantly hearing stories of disaster and suffering, we become overwhelmed by the needs, and end up figuratively throwing up our hands like, “What can I do?”

And this starts to make us numb to distress and agony, and our compassion wanes for people in need. [pauseeee]

Compassion fatigue can certainly happen to us, but there are numerous other reasons why our compassion and care for people isn’t the greatest. [pause]

Sometimes we are focused solely on our own problems.

Or maybe we have been burned in the past by those we have helped, and now we are skeptical of helping someone else. [pause]

We are prone to compassion fatigue or a lack of compassion altogether, yet aren’t you thankful that Christ is ever and always full of compassion?

He has a deep-seated, never-running-out heart full of compassion for sinners and sufferers, for just listen to Matthew 9:35-38...*[READ]*

What do we see in this passage? First...

I. Jesus had compassion for needy people.

For some people, we wonder if they are compassionate or not because they don’t show it in their lives. [pause]

¹ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/compassion-fatigue>.

It's hard to tell if someone is being compassionate, if they respond with a stoic blank stare and inactive hands to the news of someone in need.

But when you look at Christ, you can't help but notice His compassion evidenced in His life.
[pause]

"There is a Peanuts cartoon that shows Snoopy sitting outside in the middle of a snowstorm.

He is shivering from the cold, [and] Linus and Charlie Brown happen by and see Snoopy and his condition.

They say, "There is Snoopy, let's go cheer him up."

[So] they go up to Snoopy and say, "Be of good cheer, Snoopy!"

The next panel shows them walking off, leaving Snoopy in the same condition they found him, satisfied that they have "cheered" him up."² [pause]

While their compassion was in word only, Christ's compassion was in word and deed.

His compassionate character flowed out of Him through compassionate action.

Like an overflowing sink spilling water all over the floor, so the overflowing compassion of Christ couldn't be stopped, but overflowed everywhere He went. [pause]

Just consider what verse 35 says, "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." [pause]

Jesus *went* throughout all the cities and villages.

He didn't sit back and ride out His time on this earth in luxury and comfort.

He didn't say, "Eh, someone else can help those people."

No, He went and taught, proclaimed, and healed. [pause]

Going and doing takes effort, it takes time, and it takes intentionality.

And in compassionate love, Jesus went to these cities and villages. [pause]

He didn't disregard the small villages because they were too small, and he didn't disregard the cities because they were too big, but he went throughout *all* the cities and villages.

His ministry was comprehensive, he went to *all*. [pause]

Doesn't that sound a lot like His mission and purpose in coming to this earth?

² <https://www.family-times.net/illustration/Compassion/201440/>.

Jesus says in John 12:46, “I have come into the world as light, so that *whoever believes in me* may not remain in darkness.” *[pause]*

He didn’t sit back idly in Heaven, but in compassion He came.

And He didn’t come just for a select little elite group, but He came so that *all* may have the opportunity to believe. *[pauseeee]*

So Jesus’ compassionate action was seen in how he went through all the towns, but also, His compassion is seen in what He did in those towns...

He taught, proclaimed, and healed. *[pause]*

He taught the people, so they may know the truth.

He didn’t just leave them in ignorance, even though He could have. *[pauseeee]*

There’s something about when someone sits down with us and says, “OK, let me teach you how to do this.”

It shows that they care about us and want us to learn and know and grow.

That’s what Jesus did, He taught so that we may know Him and the truth that sets us free.³
[pause]

He taught, but He also proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom.

This is the good news of the kingdom, so that the people could have hope and salvation.

He didn’t want them to despair and live without hope, but He wanted them to know the good news of what God was doing through Him! *[pauseeee]*

Thirdly, in compassion, Jesus healed “every disease and every affliction.”

Now that’s care. *[pause]*

He cared about their suffering so that He went to them, found them, and healed them.

Unlike now, where *we* have to travel and find the doctor to be healed, the true Healer of Heaven found *them*. *[pauseeee]*

Aren’t you grateful for the compassionate Christ?!

He came to this earth out of love and compassion.

He taught us the truth, proclaimed the good news of life in His name, and has healed our spiritual sin sickness through forgiveness and reconciliation to God. *[pause]*

³ An allusion to John 8:32.

What a compassionate Savior!

The One with all power to heal is full of compassion, so that we can receive the healing.

[pauseeee]

That's not all of the compassion of Christ, not even close, for you can't plumb the depths of His compassion for needy people. *[pause]*

Look at verse 36, "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." *[pauseeee]*

This verse starts out by saying, "When he *saw* the crowds, he had compassion for them." *[pause]*

We all know what it's like for someone to look at us, but not see us. *[pause]*

There's a reason why some people say out of their hearts, "I don't feel seen." *[pause]*

People can look at us, just glancing over us, as though we blended into the wall, or they can see us, truly see us, and see our needs. *[pause]*

I think of Hagar in Genesis 16.

She flees from Sarai, yet the Lord finds her by a spring of water, and promises to multiply her offspring.

The Lord states that He has listened to her affliction, and how does Hagar respond?

Verse 13 of Genesis 16, "So she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, 'You are a God of seeing.'" *[pause]*

Now here in Matthew 9, that same 'God of seeing' saw the crowds.

And let me tell you this: the 'God of seeing' sees *you*. *[pause]*

He doesn't glance over you like you don't exist.

You don't blend into the wall to Him, but He sees you. *[pause]*

He sees your trials that feel so heavy right now.

He sees your emotional turmoil inside of you that you so often hide from others.

He sees your struggles that you feel like you can't share with anyone else. *[pause]*

And when He sees you, He doesn't just turn away and move on.

When He sees you, He doesn't ignore your state, or say, "Just toughen up." *[pause]*

Like He did here, when He sees you, *He has compassion*. *[pause]*

His compassion is “warm and tender”.⁴

He sympathizes with your weaknesses.⁵ *[pause]*

His seeing isn’t shallow, but like x-ray vision, He sees into the depths of your needs.

And out of His heart, compassion wells up for you. *[pauseeee]*

Do you realize this? Or do you see Him as distant and unconcerned with your trials? *[pause]*

His heart overflows with compassion, for He’s the same God of Psalm 103, which talks about how God has compassion for us as a father shows his children.

“For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.”⁶ *[pause]*

His heart isn’t stone cold to your struggles and needs, but His heart is full of compassion - He cares for you!

And when He sees you, He doesn’t just see a number like some businesses see us.

When He sees you, He doesn’t turn away, thinking, “Not this guy again,” or, “She can’t get her life together.”

No, He sees you as a person in need of compassion. *[pauseeee]*

That’s the testimony of His life, as He interacted with others, isn’t it?

When He saw a leper, He didn’t just see a leper, He saw a leper in need of grace.

When He saw the woman at the well, He didn’t just see a woman, He saw a woman in need of living water.⁷

And here when He sees this crowd, He didn’t just see a crowd to be ignored, or a crowd to be dispersed, or a crowd to be entertained, He saw a crowd who needed compassion. *[pause]*

He looked at them with compassion and saw their true state: they were harassed and helpless. *[pauseeee]*

‘Harassed’ here is pointing to the fact that the crowds were distressed, troubled, and afflicted.

And the word translated as ‘helpless’ is actually more so literally ‘thrown down’. *[pauseeee]*

One time I was walking in my backyard and I saw a bird lying on the ground.

⁴ See Hosea 11:8.

⁵ See Hebrews 4:15.

⁶ Psalm 103:14.

⁷ See John 4:1-45.

Here the bird had been attacked by another animal, was badly wounded, and was just laying on the ground struggling to survive.

That's the picture here of the crowds. *[pause]*

They were harassed and thrown down by others.

They were helpless, and couldn't do anything to help themselves.

They were like sheep without a shepherd. *[pauseeee]*

Think of sheep without a shepherd...

They are prone to attacks by wolves, and are opened up to various other dangers.

They are constantly being tormented and vexed by the situation they are in, as they have no guidance, no protection, and no hope.

That's what the people were like. *[pausee]*

The Pharisees and other leaders of Israel should have been taking care of them, but they were neglectful shepherds.

The Pharisees actually made things worse, as they wearied them with traditions and poor guidance.

They didn't care about their souls. *[pause]*

They should have been strengthening the weak and seeking out the lost—yet they were ruling them with harshness.

And because of this, they were like sheep scattered with no shepherd.⁸ *[pause]*

While they could have been finding rest, they were being used and abused by their religious leaders.

They needed a loving, good Shepherd, the very One who just looked at them with compassion, Jesus Christ. *[pauseeee]*

And when a good shepherd sees a poorly managed flock, his heart is broken and compassion rises in him, and that's what Jesus is doing with this crowd of harassed and helpless. *[pause]*

In fact, the word 'compassion' here is really deeper than at first hearing.

The Greek word actually refers to emotion coming from the bowels.

⁸ Read Ezekiel 34 and note all the similarities!

So it's essentially saying that when He saw the crowds, He had such a deep compassion that came from down deep within Him for these people. *[pauseeee]*

In our world, compassion is sometimes seen more so as a shallow feeling of feeling sorry for someone, but here it is much, much deeper than that. *[pauseeee]*

Have you ever seen someone's sad situation, where it moves you so deeply in your heart that you are driven to action—to do something—to take that next step?

That's how Jesus was here, but perfectly, He was moved to the very core with compassion for them. *[pauseeee]*

Christ has compassion for you, so remember and dwell upon His compassion.

Don't allow incorrect thoughts or beliefs about Christ to invade your mind and heart, but when He feels distant and unconcerned, go back to these verses, see His compassion, and breathe a sigh of relief.

Allow this truth to embrace you in your suffering and need -- that Christ has compassion that rises out of the depths of Him for you in your struggles. *[pauseeeee]*

Jesus had compassion for needy people, as He looked at them and saw how they needed Him, but secondly...

II. We are called to have compassion for needy people.

Notice how right after it tells us of Jesus looking at this crowd with compassion, it tells us that He turns to the disciples and says...

“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.” *[pause]*

After having such compassion, why tell His disciples about the harvest and what they should be doing?

Because Jesus is calling us to join in His compassion for needy, lost people. *[pause]*

He wants our hearts to well up with compassion, just like His.

This is why He tells us of the state of the harvest work, when He states that, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.” *[pauseeee]*

This verse is a picture of the plentiful nature of many lost souls in the world.

And He wants us to look around and not just glance over the crowds, but to *see* their need. *[pause]*

He wants us to not just see a crowd of people, but a harvest of people ready to be harvested.
[pauseeee]

Are we really seeing the unsaved people around us or are we glancing over them as if they weren't in need of a Savior? *[pause]*

Oftentimes we look at someone and just think, “eh, that guy is annoying” or “that woman doesn't look put together”.

We glance over people as if they were merchandise that we didn't want in a store or a channel on TV that has nothing on—we glance over them.

Yet we must see their need and see how there are many people out there who need Christ.
[pause]

A lot of times when we think of witnessing to people, we think of a barren field with maybe only a few stalks here and there.

We feel as though the landscape of those ready to be saved is unfruitful and desolate.

Yet Christ says, the harvest is plentiful. It is ripe and ready for harvest—it is vast.

It is when you go into the middle of a cornfield and look around and you feel lost because there is so much corn in every direction. *[pause]*

The harvest is plentiful and ready.

It's harvest time, Jesus is saying, and it's time to go to work. *[pauseeee]*

Christ saw potential in this crowd, he saw a people ready to receive the Word of God.

But how often do we look at unsaved people and think about the potential of them receiving Christ? *[pause]*

A lot of times, we do not think of the potential, but we think of their negative responses in our heads.

Yet we never find Jesus thinking like that, instead, He tells us, “The harvest is plentiful.”

But here's the issue: “the laborers of few”. *[pause]*

Though there's this harvest that is so large, there aren't enough workers out there working.
[pause]

There's this great big task, but too few workers to accomplish it, and so there is a great need: more workers! *[pauseeee]*

Imagine only a handful of people trying to pick vegetables from a field as big as the United States.

There needs to be more workers! They cannot do it alone. *[pause]*

We should be burdened over that fact, and our hearts should be beating with compassion for the lost.

And so, Jesus, what should we do about this???

He tells us in verse 38, “*therefore* pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” *[pause]*

Compassion for lost people is to be seen in our prayer for more workers. *[pause]*

We ‘pray earnestly’, and really, the word used here is literally begging.

It’s like we are on our needs pleading to God for something necessary and indispensable to the task: more workers! *[pause]*

Do we actually do this?

How often do we pray for more workers?

We may pray that God will work, or we will pray for those missionaries we know, but how often do we actually pray to God...

“Please grow more people to be able to minister for you.”

“Please work in people’s lives to go out into the harvest.” *[pauseeeee]*

Sometimes we wonder why God isn’t sending out more people into the world.

We wonder why more people aren’t saved.

Could it be that the church of God isn’t on its knees like it should be? *[pause]*

God is saying, “I want my people to be praying to me, dependent on me, for this vast harvest.” *[pause]*

You see, ministry is a divine matter, not merely a human endeavor.

God must work, and so we must go to Him in prayer for this task. *[pause]*

When we look out at the plentiful harvest, and we see that the workers are few - that should drive us to our knees.

To the God who owns the harvest! *[pause]*

He knows who should go out into the harvest, He knows when they should go, He is in complete control over it.

Like a good and effective director, he handles the harvest with precision and insight, and “dispatches”⁹ people to where they need to be. *[pauseeee]*

We cannot change people’s hearts to go, only God can do that.

Only through Him are people qualified, gifted, and sent forth with passion and hearts for others.

And that’s why Christ is saying, “I want you to depend on God in prayer because He owns the harvest.” *[pauseeee]*

We can have a confident assurance that God will work in people’s lives through our prayers.

He desires to use our prayer as a means of working in the world. *[pauseeeee]*

We are called to have compassion for people in need.

We are to look at people with the compassion of Christ, see their need, and pray for God to send more laborers into the work. *[pause]*

The need is great! So...

Stirred on by the compassion of Christ, we are to prayerfully care about those who don’t know Christ.

Do you have a heart for lost people, who are harassed and helpless without Christ?

We desperately need Jesus’ compassion for people! *[pause]*

One of the key ways to have the compassion of Christ for people is to remember the compassion of Christ *for you. [pause]*

We must realize that we were once harassed and helpless, sheep without a shepherd.

And really, we were straying sheep, turning to our own way, until Christ saved us.¹⁰ *[pause]*

You know, it’s easier to have compassion on people who are friendly and nice to us.

Those who are rude and mean—not so much.

Yet we find the Creator of this world, Jesus Christ, who is wholly righteous and wholly good come to have deep compassion on a crowd full of sinners.

For those that were rebelling and sinning against Him, He showed compassion. *[pause]*

⁹ The Greek word translated as “send out” has the idea of dispatching people into the harvest.

¹⁰ A reference to Isaiah 53:6.

This is the heart of Christ, it's abounding with compassion for sinners, so much so that eventually He went to the Cross for sinners.

He died an excruciating death for us!

He took our place, and bore the judgment that we deserved.

He looked at us with compassion, and took action that led Him to the Cross. *[pauseeee]*

All to help us, the harassed and helpless, who were unable to save ourselves or lift ourselves out of our miserable plight.

Now that's compassion, the compassion of Christ that sees people, overflows with compassion, and acts in love. *[pause]*

So let the compassion of Christ for you stir you to look with compassion on others. *[pause]*

Other people need Jesus.

They need to know and experience the compassion of Christ for them, but how can they know unless we tell them?

How can the harvest be brought in unless there's enough workers?

Pray for more workers, but also realize that He wants you to be one of them.¹¹ *[pauseeee]*

I ask that everyone bow their heads and close their eyes.

In the few remaining moments, why don't you take this time to individually pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out more workers.

Remember the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few, so let's each individually pray earnestly for God to work in people's lives to send them out with the gospel.

GIVE A LITTLE TIME.

Now let's each individually pray for how God may use *you* in the harvest work.

Do you need more compassion for the lost, so that you are stirred to speak of Christ?

Do you need boldness to speak up, sharing the gospel with your co-workers?

Take a little time now to pray for how God may use you, and after a little bit of time, I'll close in prayer.

GIVE A LITTLE TIME.

¹¹ Right after Jesus tells the disciples to pray for more workers, they are sent out in the next couple verses (See Matthew 10:1,5).