

Matthew 9:35-38**“The Lord’s Harvest”**

Imago Dei Church | Sunday AM – 3 Services | 4/8/18

INTRODUCTION

(ILL) Movies today = total destruction (Transformers, Avengers, King Kong, Godzilla, Pacific Rim, etc.).

Always two sides battling it out. And there’s always masses of random people, caught in the middle, just trying to get out of the way or figure out what they’re supposed to do.

In this section of Matthew, Jesus has been traveling throughout Galilee, and at every turn we have what seem like a head-on collision between the Lord and the brokenness of this world.

It is, in a sense, a clash of titans—the divine Son of God through whom all things were made, and the corrupting, destroying, damning effects of sin on that world.

Jesus comes down after giving his Sermon on the Mount to be met immediately in **chapter 8** with a leper (8:1-4), a paralyzed servant (8:5-13), Peter’s sick mother-in-law (8:14-17), a violent storm (8:23-27), and two demon-possessed men (8:28-34).

Then in **chapter 9**, we have a paralytic (9:1-8), a dead child, a chronically ill woman (9:18-26), a blind man (9:27-31), and a mute man (9:32-34).

Everywhere he turns, Jesus encounters a world where sin and its effects are ravaging God’s good creation.

And there, right in the thick of it all, are God’s image-bearers.

People—us—both suffering under the weight of sin and ourselves the perpetrators of that sin. **Oppressed and oppressors, victims and offenders.**

And yet, the Lord was not content to leave us languishing. He was not content to see us both destroy his creation and be destroyed by it.

So he came. He entered into it, and he encountered it.

And in the Gospel of Matthew we are presented with the clash of the Titans, so to speak, with the **fallen world** on the one hand, and **Jesus Christ** on the other, **determined to do whatever it takes to rescue and redeem that world—even at the cost of his own life.**

The text we’re looking at today helps us as **what we are supposed to do** when we find ourselves “caught in the middle,” so to speak, as the Lord encounters his broken creation.

You might be there today—in fact, you probably are. You can look in the Bible and see that it says God so loved the world, but you also look at the world and see racism, bigotry, cancer, corruption, loneliness, terrorism, broken marriages, rebellious children, abandoned children, drug-ravaged families and neighborhoods, and all manner of pride, deception, spiritual apathy, idolatry, and unbelief.

What are you supposed to do?

1) RECEIVE HIS MINISTRY

(9:35)

[35] 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.

Before we “do” anything we **must first receive**. We must first sit at Jesus’ feet and receive the grace he extends.

We often have an understandable inclination to spring into action, but like Mary sitting at Jesus’ feet rather than busying herself with serving, Jesus first invites us to be those who receive his mercy and grace.

In verse 35, Matthew essentially summarizes Jesus’ itinerant ministry for us—and he does so with **3 words**: teaching, proclaiming, and healing.

It’s what Jesus has been doing all along (this verse is almost a verbatim repetition of 4:23).

Jesus was a teacher — this is a standard part of Jesus’ ministry (e.g., 8:18 – “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.”).

He would go from town to town and teach in the local religious and cultural center—the synagogue.

And he did this a lot!

There were 204 cities and villages in Galilee, meaning “if Jesus were to speak in two towns or villages a day, it would still take about four months to canvass them all” (Carson, 239).

Jesus was also a preacher —as he taught, he also heralded the good news.

This is specifically the good news “of the kingdom”

While Matthew mentioned “the gospel” only 4 times in his book, he mentions the kingdom upwards of 50 times—often referring to the “kingdom of heaven” or the “kingdom of God.”

What is this kingdom that is being proclaimed?

We get a clue in the Sermon on the Mount—Jesus teaches his followers to pray that God’s Kingdom would come, where his will is done on earth as it is in heaven (6:10).

So we might say that **the Kingdom is the rule and reign of God over his creation such that everything exists and works according to his pleasure, plan, and design.**

When Jesus bursts onto the scene proclaiming that the Kingdom of God is at hand, it suggests that with the coming of the Christ, God’s will has been made known. It is manifest. It is beginning to take root and spread.

It is the message that the Messiah has come to redeem God’s people and restore all creation to its God-ordained design.

This is why demons shudder, the dead raised, the sick are healed, and sinners are called to repentance. Because Jesus is ushering in a new era when all that is wrong with the world is made right.

What is the proper response to this proclamation?

Repentance (e.g., John the Baptist in 3:2; Jesus in 4:17 = “**repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.**”)

It is, in effect, **turning** from our rejection of God’s will and now surrendering to him.

We must realize that the brokenness of the world is not just out there but in here.

The proclamation of the coming of the kingdom is not just a word of promise to the hurting but of warning to sinners.

And so we are invited to lay down our arms as rebels and join the kingdom by submitting to the King!

He has come for us, he has lived for us, and he died for us.

THIS is the kingdom Christ preached—one in which he is the rightful King of all creation.

Jesus was also a Healer — This is the one that we see most in the Gospels, as Jesus goes from town to town coming into contact with sickness, heartache, and death.

Matthew reminds us that caring for the physical needs of the people was as much a part of Jesus’ core ministry as was teaching and proclaiming.

He cared for the whole person.

Now, the great mistake people make in receiving Jesus’ ministry is to separate and isolate one or more of these features.

Some people want to see Jesus as a great teacher but have nothing to do with his calls to repent of sin receive him as Lord.

Others like to talk about the salvation we have in Jesus while ignoring his ministry of healing and reconciliation.

The world is broken in complex and exhaustive ways. We do not need only a portion of his work, but all of it. All of us need all of him.

We must receive his ministry as teacher, savior, healer, and Lord.

Friends, one thing that is certain about each and every one of us is that we are living under the curse and weight of sin. The good news of the gospel is that God loves you so much that he would send his own son into the world to make right what your sin and my sin have ruined.

He is wise in his teaching, he is faithful in his saving, and he is powerful in his healing. Whatever you are going through He is the rescuer you need.

And IDC family, as we talk about evangelism in this series, this text reminds us that we are not peddling knockoff watches or stolen goods. Rather, we are sharing the greatest news about the only Savior the world has ever seen.

We can be confident that when we share, we are not what people are receiving or rejecting. They are receiving or rejecting the ministry of Christ.

So, receive his ministry...

2) REFLECT HIS HEART

(9:36)

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

Jesus is not a robot, but a person. He is not dispassionate as he encounters the brokenness in the world he created.

Rather, he is heartbroken by it.

Jesus looks out at the crowds and see that they were **harassed and helpless** — languishing under the weight of being both oppressed and abandoned.

They were **“sheep without a shepherd”**—Sheep are vulnerable, and they need a shepherd to stay fed and safe. But Israel’s religious leaders had failed them time and time again.

This specific imagery is used several times to refer to God’s people in the OT. It always comes in the context of Israel’s leadership. God’s people were always in need of Godly leadership.

Bad leaders left them scattered and vulnerable, and good leaders were sent to rescue them (e.g., Moses, Joshua, David).

But all along, there was always this sense that the help Israel needed had not yet come.

Ezek. 34 paints this picture vividly:

[2] Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? [3] You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. [4] The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. [5] So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; [6] they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.

[11] “For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. [12] As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. [13] And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. [14] I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. [15] I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. [16] I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.

Jesus compassion is not simply stoked by the needs of the crowd in front of him. It is stoked by the understanding that for too long his people had been mistreated. And yet they had no one to care for them.

The failure of Israel’s leaders leads to the promise that God himself will be their shepherd.

So Jesus comes in when God’s people are in need of leadership, and as the Messiah he is the leader all other leaders have been pointing to, anticipating. He is the leader that will not fail them and will not leave them.

But if I’m honest, I wrestle with this. I feel like Jesus has missed something. These people aren’t innocent!

MY impulse is to say, “You shouldn’t have been messing with that. Now look what you got yourself into!”

I even have Scripture!

But not Jesus—his ministry is marked by compassion. He has come to his people, and he has found them hurting.

So how can we reflect Jesus’ heart?

See – The first step in all of this was Jesus looking out on the crowd and seeing them and their state for what it is.

So many times we are blind to the hurt and the helplessness around us.

(ILL) 2 year-olds are bad at seeing things.

Sometime Christians are bad at seeing things, too.

Feel – Let the weight of people's suffering and the weight of the world's corruption lead you to long for the day when all things are made new. But don't skip over the fact that right now, for the people living in this world, sin and suffering are real, and people don't know where to turn.

Act – We cannot stop with our compassion, tho. We who have received the comfort of the Good Shepherd now have the privilege and the responsibility of working so that others may also know him and his amazing grace.

Which leads to the third point:

3) RESPOND TO HIS CALL

(9:37-38)

[37] Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; [38] therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

Jesus sees the crowds, he feels compassion for their poor state, and so he turns to his followers and calls them to act.

If you’re a Christian in this room, you have a responsibility to respond to Jesus’ call.

“**The harvest is plentiful**” — harvest imagery is often associated with judgment in the Bible, but here it is associated with hope and promise.

Why? First because **it is the Lord’s harvest** (v. 38). This is God’s kingdom and God’s work. These are his people, and he is sovereign over every single aspect of their salvation.

And because it is his harvest, **he can guarantee that it is plentiful**. He knows there are people who will repent and believe when presented with the gospel of Jesus Christ!

But even with this promise of plenty there is a need—a need for laborers! The people needing rescue are out there and ready. The hurt is real, and the gospel is good! So what’s needed is simply someone to make the connection!

(ILL) The laborers are like extension cords. You use an extension cord when you have a source of power and an application that needs power. But something needs to connect the source with the need.

So Jesus issues a call.

Pray with desperation – we must first respond to the need by praying that God would send laborers.

Earnest – there is an urgency to this call. The harvest is in desperate need and certain readiness.

We can pray knowing with certainty that hell is real and the billions of people in this world who die apart from the grace of God in Christ will go there if they do not hear and respond to the gospel.

This is not a casual request for the interested few but a desperate plea for the redeemed masses!

Dependent – Look at who we're asking, tho! We're praying *to God* that HE would send laborers! What?! If it's God's harvest, and he has the laborers and he's the one who has to send the laborers, why does he need us to do anything?

It seems that in the providence of God he has ordained to use the prayers of his people to mobilize the advancement of his kingdom. God seems to take a certain delight in answering our prayers that he would advance his kingdom through the sending out of laborers into the harvest.

Pray with openness — Look in your Bibles at the very next verse (10:1): “[1] And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits,

to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction.”

Even as we pray with desperation that God sends laborers, we must also pray with openness that he might be sending us.

CONCLUSION

I began this sermon with the analogy that the Gospels present a sort of cosmic conflict between two warring sides. And this is true, to a certain extent.

But they are not equal sides, and the outcome is not uncertain. It is fixed. The Scriptures tell us how it ends.

In fact, they’ve told us how it ends from the very beginning.

In Genesis 3, when God first proclaimed the curse on all creation because of our sin, he also spoke a word of hope.

God promised to send a rescuer who would do battle with the serpent—the deceiver. And God acknowledged that the serpent would get his licks in and “bruise the heel” of the rescuer. But he also promised that the rescuer—Jesus Christ—would crush his head.

Jesus came into the world to redeem sinners, and he has not failed.

Christians are those who have, in effect, received his rescue, and as this text reminds us, we are called to reflect his heart towards the world he created, and especially towards those who bear his image.

But we are also called, invited, implored to join his work. He has a harvest he wants to gather. He wants to proclaim his victorious rescue far and wide, to every sinner guilty of rebellion and every sufferer longing for deliverance.

So pray. Pray for those who have tasted the grace of God in Christ Jesus—that they would go out into the harvest to speak the good news to sinners and sufferers. Pray that they would hear a message of forgiveness and comfort. Pray that they would repent and believe.

And as you pray, know that if you have tasted the Lord’s saving kindness, in some way you are called to be one such laborer.

The harvest is plentiful!

Will you receive his grace?

Will you adopt his compassionate heart?

Will you join his mission?