

Compelled by Compassion

Matthew 9:35-10:15

October 27, 2019

Please read Matthew 9:35-10:15 before going further in this sermon transcript.

Today we're beginning a new sermon series on "Enlarging His Kingdom." This is part of our purpose as a church. One of the ways that we "promote the supremacy of Christ" is "by enlarging His kingdom." In fact, lately, we've been focusing on "becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus together." By definition, "together" means that we are intentionally and consistently inviting others to follow Jesus with us.¹ As we consider this idea of "Enlarging His Kingdom," let's begin by admitting that there can be all kinds of wrong motivations for sharing the Good News about Jesus. Some people might see it as a way of getting God to like us more, or a way to get bragging rights, pridefully boasting about how godly we are. Some might see it as a way to get rich. There are probably other wrong motivations as well. None of these are what motivated Jesus though. His motivation was one thing: compassion.² He was compelled by compassion!

Why was Jesus compelled by compassion? Matthew 9:36 says, "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." When He saw their situation, he wasn't inconvenienced by them or impatient with them. He didn't scold them for being weak.³ Instead, He responded with compassion. One author explains: "The imagery is that of shepherdless sheep, sheep wounded and torn either by hostile animals or by thornbushes and the like, and then [lying on the ground] and helpless."⁴ Sheep are defenseless animals. Without a shepherd they are vulnerable to any attack. Even without predators they are in trouble if they have no shepherd, for they are not good foragers. They need a shepherd to lead them in green pastures and beside still waters."⁵ Jesus' heart was moved as He viewed this crowd; our hearts should be moved by lost people as well.

Jesus' heart is drawn to those who lack spiritual leadership and direction. Not so much to the spiritually elite or to those who think they've got it all figured out. But rather, to those who DON'T have it all figured out. These are the kind of people to whom Jesus was compelled to offer His shepherding. Another author writes, "The activity that we might berate as mindless he sees as the result of being leaderless... Behind the objectionable behavior, indeed the sinful behavior, lie frustration, exploitation, unarticulated despair at not knowing which way to turn."⁶ When you and I see sinners, who are out there sinning...

1. We need to see people through a lens of Christ-like compassion. We can either judge them for their sinful rebellion, their foolish living, and their dumb decisions OR we can reach out to them as those who are spiritually sick and in need of spiritual help and guidance.⁷ It changes our entire perspective when we choose to look at people through a lens of compassion rather than through a lens of dismissive judgment or elitist piety.⁸

Before we go any further though, there's an important dimension to compassion that we need to consider. Let me explain what I mean by defining some words: Compassion is "concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others."⁹ But today let's think about a particular dimension of compassion. It's something that is often referred to as compassion fatigue. Compassion Fatigue is "an attitude of indifference or apathy brought on by

¹ Earlier this year we enjoyed learning from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount is actually 1 of 5 key sections imbedded within Matthew's Gospel. Scholars often refer to them as the "5 Major Discourses." All that this means, is that Matthew intentionally structured his Gospel account around 5 longer sections of Jesus' teaching. So, even as we recognize the "Sermon on the Mount" as one cohesive unit of teaching, we can also recognize this next section. Matthew 9:35-10:42 teaches us about "Jesus Sending Out the 12 Apostles." Given the length of this section, we're going to break it down into 2 weeks. Today, we'll begin with Matthew 9:35-10:15 with a focus on "Compelled by Compassion."

² This is the same sentiment that we find in 2 Corinthians 5:14, "For **Christ's love compels us**, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died."

³ To be clear, "Jesus recognizes the prevalence and vileness of sin, yet is compassionate." Indeed, from the very beginning Matthew's Gospel makes Jesus' mission clear: Matthew 1:21 tells us, "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." Therefore, sin is not to be ignored or swept under the rug. Jesus came to deal with people's sins head on. And yet, when He views the lost, He views them through a lens of compassion.

⁴ Morris, L. (1992). *The Gospel according to Matthew* (p. 239). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; IVP.

⁵ Morris, L. (1992). *The Gospel according to Matthew* (p. 239). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; IVP.

⁶ D. A. Carson, *Jesus's Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World (A Study of Matthew 5-10)*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 2018 Repackaged ed., p. 302.

⁷ In fact, earlier in this same chapter Jesus says in Matthew 9:12, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick."

⁸ In the words of James 2:13, "...judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment." Consider Luke 1:52-53 and Matthew 5:3.

⁹ Google dictionary.

overexposure to a repeated series of appeals.”¹⁰ Our fast-paced and globally connected world is driving many of us to Compassion Fatigue. The constant stream of 24/7 news on our smart phones and our social media platforms constantly OVERLOAD us with appeals for compassion. Whether it’s the war in Syria, the latest hurricane to hit the eastern seaboard, or the recent plight of our farmers whose fields are underwater. All of this elicits compassion from us. All of this, on top of all of our local struggles. Praying for friends with cancer, trying to help families around us who are falling apart, giving money to so many in need, and on and on it goes. “We become tired; our compassion seems to dry up as we are called upon to exercise it again and again, with no seeming change in the nature of the news. We harden ourselves a little, and find it easier to philosophize about evil and suffering than to weep over it or do much about it.”¹¹ In other words, Compassion Fatigue can lead to emotional burnout, which, in turn, leads to insincere, lethargic, and mechanical obedience rather than to heartfelt, compassionate, joyous mission.¹² Jesus lived in a troubled world, just like we do. But throughout His earthly ministry, His compassion kept Him going, kept him focused. Let’s keep this in mind as we work our way through today’s passage.

Matthew 9:35 says that, “Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.” Jesus’ ministry was expanding to a size where more workers were needed. Humanly speaking, Jesus could only be in one place at a time. That’s why He calls them to pray in Matthew 9:37-38, “Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.’”

2. We need to develop a genuine heart of Christ-like compassion. A genuine heart of Christ-like compassion is what compelled Jesus to issue this call for more workers. You and I need to gain a heart that is overflowing more and more with Christ-like compassion.¹³ Apparently, this prayer in verse 38, was answered by a willing response from the 12 Apostles. Jesus urges them to share in His compassionate response to the need.¹⁴ Look at what Jesus does in Matthew 10:1 & 7, “Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness... As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’” So they were called to multiply the same ministry that Jesus had already been doing; to proclaim the message of God’s Kingdom and to display the power of that Kingdom which was being inaugurated during Jesus’ earthly ministry.¹⁵ It almost seems a little sneaky though: the workers that Jesus urged them to pray for in 9:38, ended up being... themselves! But you know, that shouldn’t really surprise us. Christianity is far from a spectator sport. As we pray and ask God to intercede and help with the problems in this world, He has a track record of including us in His plans.¹⁶

Jesus felt that His 12 Apostles were ready to go. So, in verse 5 he sends them out 2 by 2.¹⁷ Their names are listed in Matthew 10:2-4, “These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter)

¹⁰ Merriam-Webster Dictionary. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fatigue>

¹¹ Consider Matthew 23:37. D. A. Carson, *Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World (A Study of Matthew 5-10)*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 2018 Repackaged ed., p. 299.

¹² Consider Luke 8:45 and Mark 6:30-34.

¹³ Read more in D. A. Carson, *Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World (A Study of Matthew 5-10)*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 2018 Repackaged ed., pp. 308-309.

¹⁴ The Apostles answered the call and then Jesus equipped them with the authority that they would need as ones who were being sent out. Jesus not only delegated His ministry mission to them, He also delegated authority to them.

¹⁵ D. A. Carson, *Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World (A Study of Matthew 5-10)*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 2018 Repackaged ed., p. 311.

¹⁶ Consider Proverbs 24:12 and Ephesians 2:10.

¹⁷ And even as Jesus is Himself delegating some of His own ministry to the 12, He is NOT calling them to delegate it further. This isn’t one of those times where the Apostles can pass the buck. It’s not a teaching on how to recruit others to go, it’s a call to pray for their own readiness to go!

(I can’t help but think of Tom Sawyer’s clever ploy to get his friends to paint the fence that he was supposed to be painting. “In 1876, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* was published and put author Mark Twain in the literary map of the world... It was a story about the titular mischievous young boy, who wittingly tricked his way to get everything he wanted. One of the most prominent scenes in the book was the “fence scene”, where Tom Sawyer was tasked by his Aunt Polly to whitewash their fence as a punishment for a prior mischief. Tom Sawyer, being young, wished he could play instead, naturally. Ben Rogers, one of his friends saw him doing this job and did his best to ridicule the boy for his penance. Most people would bow their heads and take it in the chin. But Tom Sawyer not only turned the situation around, he spun it like a top on his palm. At the end of that day, a dozen boys painted the fence for him while he played to his heart’s desire. Here’s the kicker, they even paid him in kind for the privilege.”

<https://medium.com/@thenthgen/the-most-important-life-lesson-from-tom-sawyer-e92f86f6afb3>

Don’t get me wrong, SOMETIMES we need recruiters and mobilizers that help other people discover and use their gifts. Sometimes we need to take time and help raise funds for evangelism. A few of us may even have the skills and calling to sit at a desk and write new evangelism curriculum or to plan out a training seminar for others. A few of us are even given the privilege of being sent to Bible college or seminary for a little while. BUT, most of us, are more than ready to start serving right here and now.

and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; 3 Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; 4 Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.” Now Mathew doesn’t explicitly say that they went in 2’s, but it’s pretty clear that they did.¹⁸ It is specifically noted in the parallel account in Mark 6:7. But upon closer examination, we can also see it in Matthew 10:2-4. If we look closely at this text, all 12 of the Apostles names are in groups of two. Verse 2 starts out Simon AND Andrew, James AND John. At first, it might appear that they are listed in 2s because these are sets of brothers. But then verse 3 continues on, with Philip AND Bartholomew, Thomas AND Matthew, and so on... So, even though they could have covered twice as much ground by going out alone, the 12 break up into teams of 2. “By not staying together as a larger group, the disciples... maximized their ability to reach large numbers of people.”¹⁹ I’m intrigued by this because I’ve always been drawn to strategic thinking: smarter NOT harder.²⁰ So, their strategy was to divide up into groups of 2 and head out.

The strategy didn’t stop here though. Jesus goes on to explain another part of their strategic focus in verses 5-6, “...Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.” This may sound strange to our ears. What’s wrong with Gentiles? I’m a Gentile! Why doesn’t Jesus feel compassion for ME? Or compassion for the Samaritans, for that matter? Is Jesus being racist here!? Is Christianity some kind of an exclusive club!? Not at all. But there is a theme that we find throughout the Bible where God begins with the Jewish people first.²¹

Before we get too upset about this, it’s important that we realize that the Jews were the ones through whom the Messiah would come. And, the Jews had been waiting for the Messiah for hundreds and hundreds of years. So they needed to hear the message of His Kingdom first. But, it wouldn’t be long before the message spreads to all nations. Jesus’ compassionate concern does not stop with the Jews; we can praise God for that! You and I are very much included and cared for. Consider the Great Commission that Jesus gives at the end of Matthew’s Gospel. In fact, it’s the resounding crescendo to his entire Gospel! The Great Commission declares loud and clear that God’s master Redemptive Plan for all the ages is to “make disciples of ALL NATIONS.”²²

Jesus’ current strategy in Matthew 10 continues to get more and more interesting in verses 8-10. Here, Jesus reveals an important nuance in the relationship between ministry and money. Matthew 10:8-10 says, “...Freely you have received; freely give. Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts—no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep.” In other words, “They were to depend entirely on the hospitality of those to whom they testified... At night an extra shirt was helpful as a covering to protect from the cold night air, and the implication here is that the disciples were to trust in God to provide lodging each night.”²³ We also see this in verse 11 where they are told to stay at the home of whoever welcomes them.²⁴

So, on the one hand, verse 8 says that those who serve in ministry should “freely give.” That is, don’t charge for each healing you administer or for each demon you drive out. Don’t market the authority and power that God has freely given you and turn it into some kind of a business model.²⁵ On the other hand, verse 10 says that “the worker is worth his keep.” That is, those in ministry should be financially supported by that ministry. In other words, fellow believers are responsible to financially take care of those who spiritually take care of others by serving in full-time ministry.²⁶ Jesus is basically instructing the 12 Apostles not to “charge” for their services but, at the same time, to allow their host home to meet their needs for food/clothing/shelter.

¹⁸ It’s interesting to note that Matthew 10:2 is the only occurrence of the word “apostle” in his Gospel. ἀπόστολος = “of messengers with extraordinary status, especially of God’s messenger, envoy... predominately in the New Testament... of a group of highly honored believers with a special function as God’s envoys.” Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 122). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

¹⁹ Blomberg, C. (1992). *Matthew* (Vol. 22, p. 167). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

²⁰ The Apostle Paul also seemed to follow a certain mission strategy throughout the book of Acts. Some examples of this include Acts 13:46, 18:6, and Romans 15:20.

²¹ Another place that we see this is Romans 1:16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: **first to the Jew**, then to the Gentile.”

²² Consider Genesis 15:5.

²³ *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1665. (See also Matthew 10:11)

²⁴ If someone welcomes your ministry and the message of God’s Kingdom, then give them your blessing. If they reject God’s Kingdom, then don’t give them your blessing. In other words (verse 8), don’t “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons...”

²⁵ Consider Matthew 21:12-13 and Acts 8:18-20.

²⁶ Consider 1 Timothy 5:18 and 1 Corinthians 9:13-14. However, see also Luke 22:35-36, Acts 18:3-4, and 1 Corinthians 9:1-18.

The final piece of Jesus' instructions for this particular ministry venture had to do with how to handle rejection. A fear of rejection is a common reason why many Christ-followers, even many of us today, are hesitant to boldly proclaim the message of Jesus. But Jesus sends them out anyway, knowing that some will indeed reject their message.²⁷ Jesus gives them this instruction in verse 14-15: "If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet. Truly I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town."²⁸ "Shake the dust off your feet" is a cultural expression that doesn't translate very well in northern Minnesota.²⁹ For Jews, who wore sandals in a dry/dusty climate, this was "A ceremonial gesture that means one has no further responsibility or relationship with the places or people involved."³⁰ In Matthew 10:14, "it represented an act of solemn warning to those who rejected God's message."³¹

Well, we've now done a brief overview of Jesus' particular strategy for the 12 Apostles at this particular time in history. But what does this have to do with us? Should Christ-followers today, follow Matthew 10 as our blueprint for ministry?³² Not exactly.³³ The DESCRIPTION of ministry that we read about in Matthew 10 was not PRESCRIPTIVE for all ministry. In fact, this happened well before Jesus issued the broader call to all believers in the Great Commission of Matthew 28. But if Matthew 10 doesn't give us an exact pattern to follow for how to do evangelism today, is there ANYTHING that we can take from it and apply to our lives? Yes!

3. Compelled by Christ-like compassion, we need to respond...

1) ...by guarding our hearts from growing cold toward the lost. Each of us needs to ask God to help us care about the lost. We need to view the relentless flood of needs, through a lens of Christ-like compassion. Some of us may need to begin by repenting of our own self-serving approach to life. If God's Spirit is convicting us of a deepening apathy or a lack of concern toward people who are harassed and helpless, then we may need to begin with the prayer "change my heart, Oh God!"

We also need to respond...

2) ...by praying for and discovering, our particular strategic calling. Jesus delegates ministry to His each of His followers. "Becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus together" means that we are being taught/prepared/equipped to be sent out to our particular ministry, with our particular gifting, in our particular time/place in history. Finally, we need to respond...

²⁷ Even though they're going to the Jews, people who should be DELIGHTED to hear that "The kingdom of heaven has come near!"

²⁸ So even though we are compelled by compassion to deliver this message, we are not responsible for how someone responds. We are responsible to compassionately tell them about the shepherd that they need. Once someone chooses to reject Jesus, we are no longer responsible. The Apostle Paul understood this. This is why, toward the end of his ministry, he can say with confidence in Acts 20:26-27, "Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of any of you. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God." In other words, Matthew 9:36 begins today's passage with a compassionate response to the spiritually lost. That in turn, leads to an immediate and strategic ministry of Kingdom healing and power, and to a message of Good News! But despite the strong emphasis in this passage on Christ's compassion, it does not diminish the sobering reality of His judgment for those who reject Him.

²⁹ It communicated 2 things: 1. We are parting ways. 2. We will have nothing more to do with each other.

³⁰ *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 1949.

³¹ *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1609.

³² Does God really want Christ-followers in 2019, to carve out time to go out in groups of two, door to door, and tell people about Jesus!? For that matter, does Jesus only want us to evangelize Jewish people? Or, does He only want us to evangelize people of our same race? Should all evangelism should be done by going from town to town with no financial budget? Obviously not. This would be an overly literal application that ignores the greater context of Matthew and the New Testament.

³³ This is why we shouldn't get too distracted by the miraculous activity that we just learned about. Much of the miraculous healing and casting out of demons was not designed to be NORMATIVE. This miraculous outpouring of Kingdom power and authority was happening at a very FORMATIVE time. In other words, Matthew 10 is written at a particular time in history, when Jesus' Kingdom is being inaugurated. It is just beginning. These supernatural occurrences were mostly designed to give tangible verification that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah. They were evidence that His Kingdom was indeed breaking forth in this world in a new and powerful way. (D. A. Carson, *Jesus's Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World (A Study of Matthew 5-10)*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 2018 Repackaged ed., pp. 312-313.)

This is not at all to say, that God no longer can or will do anything miraculous. "Even though not all of the commands of verses 5-16 remain normative today (most notably verses 5-6 and 8b-10a), the fact that miraculous healings continue after Jesus' resurrection, coupled with the lack of exegetical support for views that see gifts of healings as ceasing at the end of the apostolic age, suggests that believers in all eras may expect supernatural healings from time to time." Blomberg, C. (1992). *Matthew* (Vol. 22, p. 171). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

God is still a God of miracles. But the authority that Jesus delegated to these 12 Apostles in Matthew 10 is not necessarily an authority that every Christ-follower has, in the same way or to the same degree. In fact, when we read the Great Commission, notice what Jesus does and does not say. Matthew 28:18-20, "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'" In other words, even though Jesus' Apostles do indeed go on to do many more miracles at the start-up of the Early Church, the focus of the Great Commission was on DISCIPLESHIP. It was on baptizing people and teaching them to obey God.

The more we read the New Testament and the more we reflect on the ebb and flow of God's supernatural activity, the more that we need to recognize that there is a "now/not yet" tension to the Kingdom of God. Certain aspects of Jesus' reign break forth in undeniable ways but other aspects are still limited and not fully realized. For example, although Jesus and His Apostles drove out demons and healed all kinds of disease and sickness, even raising some people from the dead, they certainly did not eradicate all evil or heal all the world's disease. As one writer puts it, "After the cross and the resurrection, New Testament writers can say... that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved; they do not say that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be healed from every physical illness." This is evident in the New Testament in several places including young Timothy. The Apostle Paul counsels him in 1 Timothy 5:23, "Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses." (See also Galatians 4:13-14 and 2 Timothy 4:20.)

3) ...by telling people about the Good Shepherd.³⁴ As one author points out, “in one sense, [this harassed and helpless state] may provide Christians with an opportunity... in the blackness of discouragement, when we are harassed and downcast, we may indeed turn to the Lord and acknowledge our helplessness apart from his grace...”³⁵ **Brother or Sister in Christ, as we are compelled by His compassion, let’s tell people about Jesus, about our Good Shepherd!**

*This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
on October 27, 2019 by Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson*

³⁴ The harvest was plentiful then, but how do we know if it’s still plentiful today? That’s a fair question. At least part of the answer is found in 2 Peter 3:9 “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” Also note 2 Peter 3:12 “and speed its coming.” God’s patience in not yet returning is a signal to us that there are still more people who will come to repentance. This should not only give us hope but inspire us to press on in our gospel mission. Consider also Acts 3:19-20.

³⁵ D. A. Carson, *Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World (A Study of Matthew 5-10)*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 2018 Repackaged ed., p. 304.