

## Matthew 9:35 – 10:8 Sermon for Home 14.6.2020

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Matthew has a habit of putting little clues into his Gospel so that we can know what is going on - our reading began with one of those clues: In Chapter 4 Matthew introduced the beginning of Jesus ministry with: .<sup>23</sup> Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. Then, in 9 v35, Matthew uses almost exactly the same words (Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness) He did this to signal that Jesus' ministry was about to enter a new and exciting phase. What we shall see is that in this new phase his followers won't just be watching mission – they shall be doing it.

To see how this new ministry unfolds I will look at some of the key points in this passage:

1. Jesus had **“compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”**

When Matthew tells us that Jesus had compassion – he doesn't mean that he had pity on them, or even just that he was concerned for them or sorry for their plight. Compassion literally means “suffer with”. The ministry of Jesus was characterised by compassion: whenever he saw the helpless, the sick, the marginalised, the oppressed he shared in their suffering – he felt their pain – and he stood with them. He didn't just act out of a sense of duty – or to satisfy a political cause but because he related to them as individuals whose pain he felt.

This weekend we are seeing more demonstrations around the Black Lives Matter banner – demonstrations which began as a response to the brutal killing of George Floyd but quickly became much bigger. Those of us whose lives have been privileged because we happen not to be born as people of colour are finding we hear the plight of the BAME community in new ways. We hear in a new way the stories of black American dads who, when they teach their sons to drive, also have to teach them the way to behave when white Police pull them over, so they don't get shot; We hear in a new way the extra, and very significant, hurdles that people of colour in this country have to overcome to reach the same position as their white counterparts: We hear in a new way that BAME medical staff are dying disproportionately from Covid-19; We hear in a new way that in so many ways people of colour experience themselves treated as being of less importance than those who are white. When those of us who are white say Black Lives Matter it is not about pity or condescension; it is about sharing in the compassion of Jesus it means listening to the stories of prejudice, it means hearing what it is like to live somewhere that is still so unjust, about learning to “suffer with” and experience the outrage that naturally flows and then becoming part of the change.

2. **Prayer and Action go Together**

The chapter divides that we are used to finding in our Bible were not part of Matthew's original writing – so what we read at the end of chapter 9 – “ask God to send out workers” is followed immediately by Jesus saying “go out into the harvest – be the answer to your prayer!” This is a pattern for our own lives – we pray for our community – for people in need of Jesus and for

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people in need of love – but we also listen to him ready for him to be telling us to go and be the answer to our prayer.

### 3. **Why only the lost sheep of Israel?** –

What Jesus tells the disciples to do sounds unexpected – why, if Jesus loves everyone – and the gospel reaches to all people – why, at this time, does Jesus only send his followers to the “lost sheep of Israel”? The clue is in why they are going to be going out – “the Harvest is plentiful” Why did Jesus send his disciples out and tell them not to go out to the gentiles? – because this was a reaping mission – their task was to go to a people filled with expectation that the Day of the Lord and the coming of the Messiah was happening – “The Kingdom of God – that which you have been waiting for – has arrived!”

This is a reaping exercise with those who are waiting. (No point sending a combine harvester into a field where the wheat is just starting to show.) We have 2 jobs of mission – sowing and reaping – sowing is demonstrating in love and prayer the reality of God’s kingdom – reaping is helping people become part of it. If our lives demonstrate the compassion of Jesus – especially towards the vulnerable and oppressed - then those we are in relationship with will start to see Jesus as we see him and start to reach out to him.

As I say this I am aware that I could easily be misunderstood. I am not saying that the only reason for loving people with the compassion of Jesus is to make opportunities for evangelism – The parable of the sower reminds us that the seed of the Spirit is scattered as much on the hard, resistant ground as well as the fruitful ground. The compassionate love of Jesus is given indiscriminately and unconditionally and so, as his followers our love should be the same. The passage ends up in verse 8 with Jesus saying: “Freely you have received, freely give.”

My own experience as a teenager with no Christian connection who experienced this unconditional love and acceptance, was that at first I just enjoyed being amongst Christians but, as time went on, I began to be attracted to the Jesus who was the source of this love. Only after I had experienced the **love** of Jesus through his followers for a while did I become open to hear the **truth** of Jesus and ready to give my life to him. As we choose to love indiscriminately and unconditionally, then some will go on to want to know the Jesus behind that love.