

The Compassion of Jesus

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[0 : 00] If you'd like to head back to your seats, we're going to look together at that passage on our International Sunday. If you could keep your Bibles open at Matthew chapter 9, that would really help me as we look at that together.

Page 974 in the Pew Bibles. And as always, you can find an outline inside the notice sheet if you'd find that helpful. As I prepared this morning, I did find there was so much to say about the first few verses that I will go much more quickly over the rest.

So please don't panic if after 20 minutes we don't seem to have got very far. Let's pray. Let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Let's bow our heads and I'll pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you so much that as we gather this morning in Glasgow, we have a glimpse of the way that your gospel is for all nations. and that one day we will gather with people from every nation before the throne and we will offer our praise to you, our Father, and to the Lamb who was slain, who stands alive again.

Father, we pray for us this morning that whatever language we naturally think in and naturally read in, you will speak to us by your spirit. And please give us heads that can understand your word and hearts that are willing to change and follow you.

[1 : 29] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Well, I've got this mate, Kov, and I was at university with him. We shared a flat together. Kov's a bit of a nutter. And he's a good footballer.

And he was asked to go on a tour with the university department that he was in. And it was a tour to the Netherlands. And they were setting off that morning, one morning in the summer.

But the day before was the day our exams finished. So we went out celebrating. And Kov was out so late that he missed his alarm in the morning. He sort of got to bed after his alarm had gone off. So he got this phone call from the guy, the captain, saying, Where are you? We're all here. The bus is ready. Where are you? Kov hadn't packed. So he just grabbed his holdall, unzipped it, got out of bed, unzipped it, and just emptied the top two drawers of his chest of drawers into it, zipped it up, got on his bike, and arrived at the coach just in time.

The engine was running. It was about to pull away without him. So he got to the Netherlands with his team, and they went out. And the next morning, for the first time, on the day of the first game, he opened up his bag.

[2 : 43] But, of course, what do you keep in your top two drawers? All he packed were pants and socks. He had two weeks' worth of pants and socks with him in the Netherlands, but no football kit, nothing else.

He'd been sent on a mission to represent his university playing football. He was completely unprepared. But when we turn to Matthew's Gospel, we find that God wants to send us on a mission.

It's extraordinary, when you think about it, that the King of the Universe wants to involve us in his mission today in the world. It's an amazing purpose for your life.

And I hear people often say, well, I want to know what my purpose is for my life. Well, God here offers you. He gives you a purpose, one that will need you to use all of the gifts that he's given to you.

But if we won't listen to his briefing, his mission briefing, then we're a bit like Kov, in a way. If we don't commit ourselves to the words of the Bible, it's like we've turned up in Amsterdam to play football with two weeks' worth of pants and socks.

[3 : 46] Thankfully, Jesus wants us to be prepared for his mission. And in this next section of Matthew's Gospel, that's what he's going to do for us. In chapters 8 and 9, we've been in this series, we've had this gripping account of Jesus himself at work.

That's his mission. Now he teaches in some of the implications for us as his people. Implications of what he has come to do. To get us in the right frame of mind to look at his mission briefing, I wanted to just start with some case studies.

And each time I just wanted to ask you, how do you feel as you hear this? How do you feel? What about this? It happened to a friend of mine. You're invited to another church to be the visiting speaker, to share your faith, how you became a Christian.

On the way out, a member of the congregation comes up to you, leans into you, and says, you know the best thing that Jesus has ever done for me? He helped me to find my wedding ring. I'd lost it, I prayed, and I found it in the freezer. Jesus helped me find my wedding ring. How do you feel? What about this?

[4 : 57] You meet a friendly American on holiday in Glasgow, and you ask them, making conversation, about the elections in America. And they say, you know that Donald Trump?

He is everything we've ever wanted. We went to one of his rallies. For too long, Americans, decent, honest Americans have been ignored, and Donald Trump's going to change that for all of us. Our nation can put their hope in him. How do you feel? What about this? You're at work, and a colleague tells you by the water cooler that they're not going to be around for a while because they're going on the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca.

You ask them if they've done it before, and they say, yeah, they've done it once, but this time they're taking their son with them, and they say to you, you know what? Last time I went, it was the most spiritually fulfilling thing I've ever experienced.

How do you feel? Last one. It gets to Christmas time, and you're watching a TV program about the rise of binge drinking and the pressure it's putting on our emergency services in this country.

[6 : 03] It shows the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff, which at Christmas time has to be transformed into an ambulance center just to deal with the additional burden on the emergency services of the binge drinking that goes on during the festive season.

As you see that report, how do you feel? In any of those cases, for any of those people, I wonder if you felt self-righteous, judgmental of them.

I wonder if you felt angry, frustrated, impatient with them. For any of them, I wonder if you felt compassion.

When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them. Because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Let's learn this morning from that compassion that Jesus has for people.

First of all, the compassion of Christ was rooted in spiritual truth. The word for compassion here is very strong. Jesus is physically agonized in his guts.

[7 : 12] He feels this overwhelming compassion for the people, pity and sympathy, and he longs to help. We get compassion fatigue, don't we?

We've got 24-hour news channels. We're always hearing sad stories, and you get worn out with it. Not Jesus. So how do we nurture that same compassion for people?

Well, first of all, we need to see the crowd. Look beyond this room and see the crowd. See the crowds in Glasgow who don't know Jesus Christ.

As I cycle through woodlands and hindland on my way home, I look at the tenements. You know, you've got these families stacked on top of each other. Crowds.

600,000 people live in Glasgow. 1.8 million people live in metropolitan Glasgow. And so many of them are unreached. They don't know Jesus.

[8 : 04] Many of them haven't even heard about Jesus in language that they can understand. 7 billion people in the world today. About a third of them claim to be Christian. Even if all that third really are Christians, that's still 4.5 billion people in the world who are not.

And who today stand under the just judgment of God for the way that they've treated him. See the crowds. Secondly, recognize their suffering.

Did you notice how Matthew describes the people that Jesus sees around him? They're downcast. Verse 35 of chapter 9. They were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Do we see that of the people around us? That they're like lost sheep, harassed and helpless. We were made to worship God, to trust him, to build our lives on him, to love him and serve him.

And everyone today, everyone who isn't a Christian, is loving and serving and trusting something else to give them what only God can give them. It might be a false God.

[9 : 10] It might be their money, their career, their family. Everyone is building their life on something. And that thing is an idol, if it's not the living God. And idols enslave you.

They leave you harassed and helpless, because you're expecting from them what they'll never give you. People need Jesus as their shepherd. Jesus doesn't excuse people's wrongdoing.

Everyone's responsible for the choice that they've made. And all of us on our own have rejected God. We've turned away from God. And yet Jesus, while not compromising on that, is gut-wrenchingly moved, because he sees the mess that it leads people to.

And he also recognises that one of the biggest problems is a lack of spiritual leadership. People are lost because they've not been led properly.

Even if they've been searching for God, they can't find him because of the lies that they are told by religious leaders. And Jesus has come to be the good shepherd that was promised hundreds of years before by the prophet Ezekiel, the one who will guard and protect and nurture God's people for him.

[10 : 18] So you might know somebody who seems to have it all, who seems content and happy and comfortable. They've got the job that everyone wants, the friends everyone wants, the popularity, the family.

We need spiritual eyes to look at those people and recognise that without Jesus, they are spiritually lost, harassed and helpless, like wandering scattered sheep.

They don't know God, and that's what they were made for. They need Jesus. See the crowds.

Know their suffering. And thirdly, understand the times.

This is key. We've been in this series in Matthew, and you could summarise what we've seen over the last few weeks like this. Jesus is amazing. He's amazing.

He's announced his arrival into our world as God's promised rescuing king, acting with power, wherever he goes, acting to save, with a leper, a bleeding woman, a father whose daughter has died.

[11 : 19] He goes to the dirty, and he makes them clean. He goes to the diseased, and he gives them healing. He goes to the dying, and he gives them life. He goes to the despised, and he overwhelms them with love.

He goes to the desperate, and the distressed, and he gives them hope and joy. He travelled around the world, putting the world right. And Matthew summarises that in verse 35.

It was the first verse we had this morning. 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.

You know, we've got quite a few medics here in our church family, and there was this, there's lots of news, isn't there, about the junior doctors going on strike. They were on strike in England last week. If we were in Galilee in 30 AD, we'd have been telling the junior doctors, actually, we don't need you next week.

Do you mind just not coming in? Because we don't need you here. The hospitals are quiet. For a brief moment in history, we didn't need doctors, because Jesus was here, and he was pointing us to the world as it will be when he comes back, when there won't be any disease anymore.

[12 : 30] Heaven on earth. But it was just a momentary glimpse of that. And today, Christians are just as vulnerable to the suffering and pain of our world as anybody else, aren't they?

We know that. Why? Well, there was a key verse for us understanding that. You might remember, we looked at it back in chapter 8, verse 29. It was the question that the demons asked of Jesus when Jesus drove them out of two men.

Chapter 8, verse 29. What do you want with us, son of God? They shouted. Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time? Well, the appointed time is judgment day, the day when Jesus comes to judge and to bring a new world.

He'll come in glory. And the demons know about that day. And they know that this is the man. This is the son of God. But what they don't know is what is Jesus doing here now?

Why has he arrived early? And the answer comes at the beginning of the next chapter, chapter 9, verse 6, when Jesus says about himself, the son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins.

[13 : 40] That's his mission. That's why he's here early. And that's why today in 2016, the appointed time has still not come. And we're waiting for it. Do you see how we have to understand the times that we're living in?

These are the days of salvation. The days when the mission of Jesus Christ is to forgive sins. So that the mission of the church, of us today, is to pass on the news to the world that anybody can come to Jesus and be forgiven of their sins.

So this is the spiritual truth, friends, that causes us to have compassion on the people around us. If we can grasp it more deeply in our hearts, we have to see the crowds, we have to know their suffering, that without Jesus, they are harassed and helpless.

They are perishing. They stand under the judgment of God. We have to be grounded in the absolute conviction that Jesus really is who he claimed to be, that he demonstrated that by doing things that only God can do.

And we have to understand the times that today anybody can turn to Jesus and be forgiven, whatever they've done. So as we develop that compassion at St. Silas, what do we do about it? [15:00] That's our second point. The compassion of Christ led to fervent prayer. Have a look with me at verse 37. 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. When you think about how few people in Glasgow are Christians, what do you think the biggest obstacle is, the problem is?

Because I tend to think it's because people are not interested. Jesus sees the crowd and he says the harvest is ready to bring in.

The problem is we haven't got the workers. I've got a friend, Bernie. She grew up on a farm in Ireland and her dad, the farm is for porridge oats.

And we were with Bernie one day when her dad rang, elated, because it was harvest day and they brought the harvest in. And she explained, he goes out around harvest time every day and he's checking the crops every day.

[16:11] He's waiting for exactly the right day to bring the harvest in. And on that day, he phones the seasonal workers. There are guys who go to that part of Ireland at that time of year so they can bring it all in in one day.

If you don't get it all in, you lose the crops. It's urgent. If he made the call that day and there hadn't been workers, it would have been a disaster for the whole year's work. That's the picture Jesus gives us of the world around us then and today.

The harvest is plentiful. The fields are ripe. People to bring in to become Christians. But the workers are few. The people to go out there on mission for Jesus, telling the world about him and the forgiveness that he offers.

So what's the first thing that we should do about it, about the lack of workers? What do we do about it right now? Do we set up a new theological college in Glasgow? Do we set up a new leadership program in our church or launch a new business plan?

Well, those might be great things to do, but they're not the first thing, are they? The first thing Jesus calls the disciples to do is to pray. Ask the Lord.

[17:24] What for? For workers. We need workers. And that prayer would include asking for more full-time workers. People who we can set apart in a place like St. Silas, where, let's be honest, most of us could live much more simply than we do in order to free up money, to set other people apart so they can spend all their time telling people about Jesus and nurturing God's people in ministry.

But workers includes all of us as well, wherever we've been placed by God today, to live for him. We need Christians working for Christ to share him in every area of life in Glasgow, in our businesses, in our banks, in our hospitals, in our schools, our factories, our toddler groups, our international cafe, our law firms.

And we need to pray to God for workers to leave St. Silas, that we lose people because we send them around the world to places like Tanzania and Laos and Yemen and Kazakhstan where there are unreached people, entire people groups who've never heard of Jesus, people who have turned their back on God like the rest of us, they stand under God's judgment but they are born and they live and they die and they never hear about Jesus unless there are workers to go and tell them. We need more workers and so we need to pray. We need to pray for that. Come to our monthly central prayer meeting so that we can pray for workers. Pray as individuals.

Ask the Lord to help with this urgent need because we have compassion. What next? Well, the compassion of Christ led to fervent prayer and then it led to apostolic mission.

[19:15] Jesus shows next that we need to be ready to be the answer to our own prayers. He calls his disciples to pray for workers. The next thing he does is sends them out to be workers for him.

And the same is true for us this morning. Some of us, out of compassion for the needs and because we understand the times would need to be willing to change our jobs.

I wonder, will you consider becoming a ministry trainee here at St Silas or a missionary that we could send out somewhere else to tell people about Jesus? For others of us, it will mean devoting ourselves wherever we are to this mission, the mission of Jesus.

So Jesus sends the disciples out and there are unique things about their first mission. We have to face that as we look at the kind of mission briefing.

If you look at verse 5, these 12, Jesus sent out with the following instructions, do not go among the Gentiles, that is the non-Jews, or enter any town of the Samaritans.

[20 : 22] Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. Well, that's unique. By the end of Matthew's Gospel, it's changed and the mission is to go to all nations. That's what we have today.

And Jesus is using these first 12 apostles here as unique extensions of his work at that time. We see that in verse 1. He called his 12 disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.

Well, that's exactly how Matthew's just described what Jesus has been doing. So that we get the link. In verse 8, Jesus tells them to heal the sick and raise the dead.

But of course, as we look at the world today, there is no immortal church still alive from that time where, because the dead were being raised and people were being healed, nobody has ever died. There was something unique about the miraculous healing power given to those first 12 at that time because they had to have their message about Jesus authenticated so that Jesus could announce his arrival to the world as God's promised rescuing king.

[21 : 33] So for my money, I believe God can heal today and I believe that it's right to pray for healing for people because God is powerful to do that. But we do recognize that there is a difference between praying for healing today to our compassionate God and recognizing that the signs and wonders that came with Jesus and those first apostles were of a different category as signposts that God's king had finally arrived.

But even though those are things that are unique to that first mission, there's still parts of Jesus' mission here that apply for all time. And fundamentally, this morning, let's take on board that it's mission with a message.

Jesus says in verse 7, have a look, as you go, preach this message, the kingdom of heaven is near. They have to announce that Jesus Christ, God's king, has arrived.

And that's true in every generation. Of course, we can work that out if we understand the times. People's greatest need is this shepherd and the forgiveness that he offers.

But that it's mission with a message is very controversial. in churches today. There are lots of churches that would say we shouldn't proclaim anything. We don't share a message. Instead, mission is just about showing God's love by our actions.

[23 : 00] It is hugely important if you're a Christian to show God's love by your actions. These passages come hot off the back of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus urged his people to live radical lives of love, to be a city on a hill drawing other people in.

That's hugely important. But I take it from Jesus' teaching here that for all our activity, if we don't speak about Jesus as God's promised rescuing king and his death on the cross as the only way people can be forgiven, it's not mission.

It's not mission in the way Jesus wanted mission done. Not in the sense we're seeing here. So there's this quote, I don't know whether it was originally by him but it's famously attributed to Francis of Assisi, Preach the gospel at all times, if necessary, use words.

It's popular because it communicates something so important that actually we do need by our lives to demonstrate that we belong to God. But it's not enough, is it?

It's not enough. You can't preach the gospel without using words. It's always necessary to use words. Otherwise, you've not preached the gospel. It's mission with a message.

[24 : 17] And lastly, because of that, because there's a message, it's mission that divides. The apostles are called in verse 7 to find someone who will accept the message when they arrive in a new town.

Verse 11, Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave. So there are people who are sympathetic, who are receptive, but other people will reject the message.

And when they do, they're worse off than if they never heard it. Verse 14, If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town.

I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. Well, Sodom and Gomorrah were these two towns in ancient times that God had completely destroyed because of their wickedness.

And Jesus is so plain, isn't he, in his warning here. He is God's king and for anyone who won't accept his authority, there will come a point when it's too late and the judgment for them will be unbearable.

[25 : 33] That's the language that he uses. So if you wouldn't yet say you're a Christian, I want to urge you with everything I've got to listen to the words of these first followers who saw Jesus do these things, who were so convinced he'd risen from the dead that they died as though they had no fear of death.

Trust their testimony about him. And if you're willing to do that, then wonderfully Jesus offers you what you could never earn or deserve.

We see that in verse 12 as the apostles do get received by a household. Jesus says in verse 12, As you enter the home, give it your greeting. If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it.

If it is not, let your peace return to you. Well that peace, that shalom, it's not just a sentimental greeting, it's a promise. If you receive the message of the apostles about Jesus, you have peace. Peace with God. That's why Jesus came, to bring that peace. His mission is to forgive sins. So friends, let's be prepared to work for Jesus with purpose.

[26 : 48] If you belong to him, he calls you on a mission. Will we share his compassion for the crowds? And will we let that spur us on as a church into prayer and into mission with a message so that the harvest can be brought in and the kingdom can grow.

Let's pray together. Father in heaven, we praise you for the compassion of Jesus Christ. We thank you that that compassion extends to us.

Not because of anything we deserve, but because of his great love. we thank you that he cared for the harassed and helpless, that he came to be the shepherd of your sheep. Thank you that we have freely received his blessing, that he's cleansed us and healed us, that he has given us new life and love.

So Father, we pray that you will give us spiritual eyes, that we might see the crowd, know their suffering, and understand the times in which we live.

Father, please help us to act, to pray, to join your mission. And we pray that though your message will bring division, that you will save many and bring in a plentiful harvest for your glory.

[28 : 06] Amen. I'm going to hand back to Gordon now. Thank you. Thank you.