

The King's Messengers **Matthew 9:35-38**

We're in the final week of our three-part series on our church's vision statement: *Embrace God's Truth ... Enjoy His People ... Extend His Glory*. The sequence of those statements are deliberate because we *begin* the Christian life by embracing the truth of who Jesus is and how he has saved us through his atoning death and resurrection. Those who *believe* in Jesus *belong* to God's family. That's why we "enjoy God's people." Romans 15:7 says, "Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." This takes us to the third part of our vision statement: ***Extend [God's] Glory***.

The glory of God can be defined as the "outward expression of his own excellence."¹ Just as getting baptized is going public with your faith, so God's glory is his going public with his greatness – putting it on display for others to see. For instance,

- God reveals his glory through *creation*. Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork."
- God reveals his glory most clearly and powerfully through his Son, *Jesus Christ*, the one to whom all Scripture points. The apostle John testified, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Likewise, the author of Hebrews states, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being...."

There's a third way God reveals his glory, and that is through *the church*. The night before his death, Jesus prayed for all who would believe in him. He testified to the Father, "The glory you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one" (John 17:22). As we love one another as Christ has loved us, the world will look at the church and say, "God is at work there!"

Becoming like Christ is the key! The glory of the church is not an inherent glory, but a derived glory. It's a glory that God gives us through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. In 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul says,

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, which is from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

The *Spirit* of God uses the *word* of God to help the *people* of God become more like the *Son* of God. In Matthew 9, we see Jesus' compassion for lost people – people who are far from God, are suffering the effects of sin, and need salvation. As Jesus ministers to these people, he enlists the help of his disciples.

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994, 2000), 221.

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

10 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. ² The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thad-daeus; ⁴ Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. ⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out....

- Matthew 9:35 – 10:5a

Father in heaven, help us to listen to your Holy Spirit as he speaks to us through your Word, that your Son Jesus might be glorified. We pray this in his name. Amen.

A soldier who was wounded during a field training exercise was ordered to go to the military hospital for treatment. When he arrived at the hospital, he saw two doors, one marked "For the slightly wounded" and the other "For the seriously wounded." He entered through the first door and walked down a long hallway. At the end of it were two more doors, one "For enlisted personnel" and the other "For officers." He walked through the second door and found himself going down another long corridor. At the end were two more doors, one "For commissioned officers" and the other "For non-commissioned officers." He walked through the second door and wound up on the street. When he returned to the barracks, his superior asked him, "How did things go at the hospital?" "Well," said the soldier, "the people there didn't do anything for me, but they sure are organized!"

The same could be said for many churches today. They're well organized but not very helpful to those who are hurting. Why is that, when we have more technology, opportunities and resources than ever before? Jesus tells us the reason right here in Matthew 9: It's a *lack of workers*. Jesus impressed upon his disciples the same truth that his Spirit wants to inscribe on our hearts today:

***Rescuing lost people requires our compassionate,
prayerful participation in God's mission.***

That's why the passage we read earlier in our service, Matthew 28:18-20, is called the Great Co-mission. We are on mission with God to make disciples. This means that, as believers, we are not only to *celebrate* the gospel, but we're also to *spread* the gospel. For that to happen, we must take our cue from Jesus.

We must start with his heart. The Great Commission is fueled by great compassion. For our hearts to be moved, we need to see the world as Jesus does.

Divine Perspective (Matt. 9:35-36)

“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. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt. 9:35-36).

Here at the end of chapter 9, Matthew closes out a section of his Gospel wherein he has recounted various miracles by Jesus coupled with his teaching on discipleship. Jesus’ miracles authenticated his message as the long-awaited King, the Messiah sent by God. Remember what the Pharisee Nicodemus said to Jesus in John 3: “We know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him” (John 3:2). B. B. Warfield, one of the greatest theologians in American history, wrote,

When our Lord came down to earth, He drew heaven with Him. The signs which accompanied his ministry were but the trailing clouds of glory which He brought from heaven, which is His home.²

The “clouds of glory” included the love of God. That’s why, “when [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion for them” (v. 36). The Greek term for “compassion” refers to a person’s intestines. When Jesus saw lost people, he was not only emotionally moved but he was also physically affected. You know what this is like when you see someone you love suffering. Your heart aches, your stomach churns.

That’s how Jesus felt when he “saw the crowds.” Why? “Because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.” They were “distressed and dejected” with no real direction in life. They were chasing after things that they thought would bring them satisfaction but wound up empty, anxious, and sad. They desperately needed Jesus as their “merciful shepherd.”³

That’s why he proclaimed to them “the gospel of the kingdom.” “The kingdom” is the reign of Christ – now in the lives of his people and eventually and eternally over the new heavens and the new earth.⁴ Jesus is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). We know that, but others don’t. That’s why we, like Jesus, need to announce the good news!

² B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1918] 1983), 3. Cited by John MacArthur, Jr., *Matthew 8-15*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1987), 106.

³ David Platt, *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary: Exalting Jesus in Matthew*, series editors David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), 132.

⁴ MacArthur, 105.

Do you see people the way Jesus did? When you see the crowds at your school, your workplace, your neighborhood, in restaurants, at sporting events, can you feel their suffering? Scripture says, “Even in laughter the heart may ache, and when the laughter ends, the grief remains” (Prov. 14:13 ESV, NLT). To see this, you must look past the surface of people’s lives. Only the Lord can give you that kind of insight and sensitivity. Years ago Steve Green wrote a song about this:

*Every day they pass me by – I can see it in their eyes
Empty people filled with care, headed who knows where.
On they go through private pain, living fear to fear.
Laughter hides their silent cries only Jesus hears.*

*People need the Lord, people need the Lord!
At the end of broken dreams, He's the open door.
People need the Lord, people need the Lord!
When will we realize [that] people need the Lord?*

*We are called to take His light to a world where wrong seems right
What could be too great a cost for sharing life with one who's lost?
Through His love our hearts can feel all the grief they bear.
They must hear the words of life only we can share.*

To save the lost, we must see them as Jesus did. But this *divine perspective* must be accompanied by *diligent prayer*.

Diligent Prayer (Matt. 9:37-38)

“Then he said to his disciples, ‘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’” (Matt. 9:37-38). Jesus shifts metaphors, from shepherding to harvesting. We tend to think of the harvest as people being ripe for the gospel. While that is true, that doesn’t seem to be Matthew’s emphasis. A few chapters later (Matt.13), in the Parable of the Wheat and Weeds, Jesus describes the harvest as a time of judgment. He says at the end of the age he will bring the wheat (believers) into his barn (his kingdom, the place of eternal blessing), but he’ll throw the weeds (unbelievers) into the “blazing furnace” where there will be “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” At the Final Judgment, every person will either be “barned” or “burned.”

Jesus went all out in serving others and sharing the gospel with them, because he knew of the awful judgment that awaited those who were separated from God. The global population in Jesus’ day was 300 million. Now it’s nearly eight billion, five and a half billion of which are still lost. If we were to view five of these people per second, it would take 35 years to see everyone. *Do we sense the urgency of this crisis?*

One would think that given the condition of the lost and the coming judgment, Jesus would say, “Here’s the harvest, now *go!*” But instead, he says, “Here’s the harvest, now *pray.*”⁵ Pray for the Lord of the harvest to send out more workers into his harvest. This made me think of something I heard a pastor say years ago: “The mark of a great church is not its seating capacity, but its sending capacity.”

We’ve said that church is not a spectator sport. This same principle applies to missions. Our churches should be launching bases for laborers in God’s harvest. No one should be a spectator. Yet many Christians never consider the possibility that God might call them to go and proclaim the gospel in another location.

Jim Elliot, the missionary martyr to the Auca Indians of Peru, lamented the fact that so few were willing to go to the mission field in his own day. He said, “Our young men are going into [other] fields because they don’t ‘feel called’ to the mission field. We don’t need a call; we need a kick in the pants.” ... And when we pray, God will send us out in different ways to different places.”⁶

That’s precisely what we see at the beginning of Matthew chapter 10.

Deployed Personnel (Matt. 10:1-5)

That’s what we see in the opening verses of Matthew 10. After commanding his disciples to pray, Jesus calls them to himself, equips and empowers them to carry on his work, and then sends them out.

If you’re familiar with the twelve apostles, you know that they were an eclectic bunch with different backgrounds, personalities, temperaments, and skill sets. And they were far from perfect. In fact, one of them ended up being a traitor. But it shows that Jesus uses all sorts of people to accomplish his mission.

The apostles’ mission was different from ours in that they were given the ability “to heal every disease and every affliction” and other miraculous works. In 2 Corinthians 12:12, Paul refers to these works as “the signs of an apostle.” Likewise, the author of Hebrews says, “God confirmed the [apostles’] message by giving signs and wonders and various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit...” (Heb. 2:4 NLT). Furthermore, the apostles were initially sent “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:6).

But by the time we get to the end of Matthew’s Gospel, after Jesus has died and risen and is about to ascend to heaven, he commissions these disciples – and by implication all disciples – to go to “all nations” with the Good News of salvation

⁵ Ibid., 134.

⁶ Platt, 134. Elliot quote source, cited by Platt: Elisabeth Elliot, *Shadow of the Almighty: The Life and Testament of Jim Elliot* (San Francisco: Harper & Brothers, 1958), 150. Cited by Platt, 134.

(Matt. 28:19). As the supreme King over heaven and earth, Jesus commissions us with his divine authority and assures of his presence at all times, in all places, to the end of the age. He has empowered and equipped us to **extend his glory** to the ends of the earth.

With this in mind, I'd like to sum up this sermon and this series with five points of application based on today's passage, using the word "glory" as an acronym. How can you *extend God's glory*?

Go: Go out into the world, into *your* world, the sphere of influence where God has placed you, with a missional mindset.

Love: Love people like Jesus. See them with his eyes – eyes of compassion. As Steve Green memorably sang,

*Through His love our hearts can feel all the grief they bear.
They must hear the words of life only we can share.*

Own: Own your responsibility in the matter. *What is the greatest experience of your life?* Knowing Jesus as your Savior. *What's the most important thing you can do for another person?* Help him or her to know Jesus as their Savior. You are the King's messenger! When Pastor Kaynenn was here, he would often say to my son, "Rep the King!" That is the responsibility and privilege of every Christian. Own it!

Rely: Rely on the Holy Spirit to do all that Christ has commissioned you to do, and ask the Lord of the harvest to send more workers into his harvest. Without the Lord's help, we can do nothing. But with God all things are possible. So as you go out into the world and love others like Jesus, owning your responsibility to rep the King well, rely on the Holy Spirit.

Yearn: Yearn for the day when a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language ... will stand before the throne of God and the Lamb of God ... and will shout with a great roar,
"Salvation comes from our God who sits on the throne
and from the Lamb!"
And [they'll fall] before the throne with their faces to the ground and [worship] God [and] sing,
"Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor
and power and strength belong to our God forever and ever! Amen."