

KING OF COMPASSION

SCRIPTURE Matthew 9:35–38: 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.”

SYNOPSIS The whole drama of redemption is marked by compassion. The unveiling of Jesus’ identity has been stressed in the immediate context. He is undeniably the Christ. Now, on the heels of open rejection, Christ’s glory shines with the warmth of compassion for the crowds. This is no mere emotion. It is deep, gracious love that acts on behalf of its object. In this transitional passage, Christ’s compassion gives motive to His commission. He will soon send out His laborers to garner the lost sheep of Israel, testifying that He is the Christ who is faithful to His promises. The scene captures the beauty of the glory of a new dawn beaming out to humanity in compassion. The warmth of the kingdom invades and touches lives as the dawn of the King rises. Jesus is the King of compassion.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. **THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT** — This passage is notoriously taken out of context. Though this is most often done with good intention, it doesn’t make it right. It is not uncommon to use the wrong text to preach the right theology. Discuss what is missed when this is done? What are some of the dangers of doing this? What specifically is often missed in the authorial intent of this passage? How does this impact your approach to the Bible? How does this help you in understanding the Bible? What difference does this make to your spiritual health and daily application of spiritual truth?
 - a. What is the best contextual meaning of “harvest” in the figure that Christ uses?

 - b. What “gospel” would they have preached at that time? Could it be the same message we preach? Read Matthew 16:13-20, which happens much later than our passage. Did the apostles understand the “gospel” of Christ crucified and risen even once it was revealed to them that Jesus was the Christ? Now read Acts 2:38; Romans 1:1-6; 3:23-26; 1 Corinthians 1:23; 2:1-2; 15:1-4; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13; 6:14; 1 Peter 3:18. Discuss the essential elements of the gospel.

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2. **CHRIST'S FAITHFULNESS** — Jesus demonstrates the very faithfulness of God. What we should see in His ministry at this time is that He is faithful to fulfill the promises of God. God made a nation for His name (Israel). God made promises to them, promises to gather them, to forgive them, to rescue them, to heal them of their afflictions, to bless them with a new heart, to be their Shepherd-King and bring a new kingdom. God is faithful. Jesus is the one who fulfills God's promises. Many of these promises have already been demonstrated through the teaching and various miracles in Matthew 5-9 (summarized in 9:35). How does the faithfulness of Jesus to fulfill every promise of God even against all opposition and rejection affect you? Remember, He is being rejected by highly knowledgeable, biblically educated, and very religious people. Even His own apostles didn't expect Him to fulfill the promises of God the way He did (Matthew 16:21-23). Trusting Jesus means trusting that He will fulfill His promises, not our preferences. Do you trust Christ when life is not unfolding the way you would like? Do you believe that He will work for your greatest good, knowing that this doesn't guarantee that you will feel good in the moment? Discuss how the miracles of physical healing provide a sample taste of the kingdom to come and how this is designed to make much of Christ in His person and promise.

3. **CHRIST'S COMPASSION** — Compassion marks the heart of Christ and chiefly represents the whole story of redemption. Salvation comes to us because God is compassionate towards the undeserving who are afflicted and destitute because of sin. This is the emphasis in our passage: *Jesus was deeply moved with compassion for the multitudes*.
- a. The word used here for "compassion" is the strongest verb in the Greek language describing a deep-seated sympathy. No single English word does justice to its depth of meaning. This is no mere emotion. It is deep, gracious love that acts on behalf of its object. It includes the practical response which meets needs. The Incarnation itself points to God's compassion for sinners. Read the other texts that employ this same Greek word: Matthew 14:14; 15:32; 18:27; 20:34 (see also Mark 1:41 and Luke 7:13; 10:33; 15:20). These are pictures and figures of God tenderly touching us in our need. How does it impact you that Christ came for your good, not His own? That He loves you with a tender, practical compassion?

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- b. It was more than the physical and material destitution of the crowds that moved Jesus with compassion. What is stated in the text that indicates this? Read Zechariah 10:2 and Mark 6:34 and discuss how in both examples the lack of a “shepherd” points to the need of spiritual nourishment (teaching).

What captures Jesus as the promised Messiah here? Read Ezekiel 34:1-6. This is way Jesus sees Israel at His coming. Now read Ezekiel 34:11-15 and compare it to 34:23-24; 37:24. Is it Yahweh or is it His servant David (the greater David, or “Son of David” [see Matthew 9:27], or Messiah, since this was written well after David’s death) that will be the compassionate shepherd of God’s people?

- c. As we come closer to the cross we increasingly see more of the heart of Christ. Seeing more of Him should cause us to make much more of Him. Are you moved by the physical destitution of others? Are you moved by the spiritual destitution of others? Do you see people through these lenses, as Jesus does? How many people do you see living aimlessly, as without a glorious end and purpose to life? How many do you see with no spiritual protection, no spiritual provision, no spiritual guide, and no spiritual comfort? It has well been said that “all around we see men and women, young and old, who are harassed and helpless, bruised and battered by life, lost and alone in the world, resorting to pleasures, or drugs, or anything else that they think will make life more tolerable or death more acceptable.” Do you have compassion on them, or are you inclined to avoid them? Do you make much of Christ in having compassion for others?