



MONDAY 30 JANUARY 2017

SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Read: Matthew 9:35-36

Plug In...

We return to the Gospel of Matthew from this week.

The emotion Jesus has is *compassion*. More than the other three Gospels, Matthew emphasises Jesus' compassion. Other examples are the two huge, hungry and sick crowds (14:13-21 & 15:29-39) and the two blind beggars (20:34). Jesus demonstrates His compassion by healing the people and feeding them.

Here in Matthew 9, the people need a shepherd/s to care for them. "Harassed/helpless" is the final condition of an exhausted sheep where it gives up and lies down defeated. We will soon see Jesus demonstrate His compassion by commissioning workers to shepherd the people.

Chew It Over...

Matthew focuses on Jesus' compassion to show us that it is this compassion that motivates all that Jesus has done, both the healing and teaching.

Ask whether you have something of a gut-level response to the spiritual condition of people around you. How can you cultivate a more graphic picture of the neighbour, work colleague, family member, so that you see them as harassed and helpless?

Prayer Suggestion

Ask God to give you the same compassion that motivated Jesus to action. May we be deeply affected by the plight of our neighbour.



The Lakes

TUESDAY 31 JANUARY 2017

SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Read: Matthew 9:37-38

Plug In...

Compassion urges Jesus' entire ministry. Seeing all these defeated "sheep" Jesus switches the metaphor to harvest. It is these overwhelmed, overpowered sheep that are ripe for the harvest.

The harvest imagery occurs in Old Testament contexts explaining the "Day of the LORD". That harvest day is one of judgement and salvation. Following a battle (judgement) the ground will look like sheaves left behind after a reaper went through (e.g. Jeremiah 9:21-22). Switching the metaphor, the harvest follows a bumper crop (salvation) representing the blessing and security of being with God (e.g. Isaiah 30:23).

Bringing our attention to this two-sided Old Testament image is important to the rest of what Jesus says in Matthew 10.

Chew It Over...

Are you willing to take your pulse? Answer these questions with one of these: *fervent, somewhat, apathetic*.

1. What's the temperature of compassion and follow-through with mission at *The Lakes*?
2. Your Growth Group?
3. Personally?

Maybe a step-back is needed if compassion and follow-through is not strong. Take the temperature again regarding prayer.

Think into how you can foster personally, within your Growth Group, and within The Lakes fervent compassion that takes serious mission action.

Prayer Suggestion

Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.



WEDNESDAY 01 FEBRUARY 2017

SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Read: Matthew 10:1-4

Plug In...

Jesus directed His disciples to pray for workers. Jesus then commissions the Twelve to be workers. Jesus presumably prays the prayer, then goes into action.

Chew It Over...

We need to ask God for workers, then ask people to be workers. Asking people follows praying. We don't need to wait, rather take deliberate action. If we believe our prayer will be heard and we are praying the very prayers Jesus gave us (see also Matthew 6:9-13) we can act in confidence, anticipation, expectation. Prayer is not wishful thinking. However, success does not happen without God. Do not bypass prayer. Prayer is vital – it comes first – because it is God's mission. God is *Lord* of the harvest.

Prayer Suggestion

Ask the Lord to make evident whom you can ask to join you in some evangelism, mission-based work. Ask the Lord to help them step up and step in. Pray that the Lord will keep your eyes open to those who are helpless, sick, and in pain. May our awareness of human pain open up the missional field to us.



THURSDAY 02 FEBRUARY 2017

SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Read: Matthew 10:5-6

Plug In...

The word “lost” is perishing, dying, being destroyed. It is the sheep, Jesus says, that are so harassed they’re at the end, exhausted and lying down to die. Jesus targets them first. These ‘lost sheep’ comprised most of the general population of Jewish Palestine.

[NB: While the mission is restricted to Israel, we soon learn this is a temporal restriction. Later in this chapter Jesus prepares the disciples for suffering as they go on mission, even to other nations (10:18). The temporal restriction is to make utterly clear to Israel that their Messiah had arrived and was rebuilding down-trodden Israel. While temporal, many principles from this narrative continue to be applied in the New Testament to mission in general.]

Chew It Over...

It is the forgotten people, the so-called “little people” that Jesus focuses the disciples mission upon. For sure, we share the gospel with anyone, for God brings people from everywhere. And we desire people from all strata of life to believe, but there is a *harvest* amongst the down-trodden, the poor-spirited. Matthew 18:10 – “*See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.*”

In our well-to-do society we define ourselves by whom we associate with. How can you define you're on mission by giving relational-energy to those on the side-lines? Who are the names popping into your head right now? What will be your first steps to connect and invest?

Prayer Suggestion

Make it a regular practice to ask Jesus who you are not seeing because of prejudice. Ask this as you consider where to sit in a meeting, who to talk to at lunch, who to invite next to dinner or coffee.



FRIDAY 3 FEBRUARY 2017

SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Read: Matthew 10:7-15

Plug In...

In the centre of this list of commands on how the Twelve are to conduct their mission is the line, “you have received free of charge; give free of charge” (v.8). Doing mission means relying on God and God’s people to welcome you, support you (v.10). Yet, Jesus speaks to the reality that it could be done for profit or a fame-making exercise.

Chew It Over...

Turn on early-morning TV and you see many making huge money, gaining wide fame, through preaching the gospel. This is all strange and wrong, yet possible and true.

At The Lakes that staff do not receive financial or substantial gifts? Sometimes a person wants to give a staff member a gift to express gratitude. However, policy at The Lakes is that gifts, if received, are placed into the offering collection to the benefit of all of God’s people. The church support their staff so they do not have to concern themselves by chasing money for meals, accommodation, looking after their families, etc. And, the people at The Lakes by no means have the attitude some churches have had: “we’ll keep him poor so that the Lord can keep him humble”. Yet, in order to avoid favouritism and corruption, staff re-gift any gift back to the church.

Wouldn't it be awful if a minister gave extra ministry attention to a person because they felt obliged after receiving a gift; or neglected to rebuke or speak God's Word into a person's life because their concern was how this touches the bottom-line. Favouritism can happen; corruption can happen – The Lakes is not immune. This is not to dismiss the real gratitude people express and the encouragement they want to symbolise by gifts. Nevertheless, The Lakes policy minimises potential corruption and maximises proclamation of the gospel. The ultimate gift of gratitude is the so called "pay-it-forward" principle which by-the-way isn't Oprah's idea, but Jesus'. Jesus says: freely we have received the gospel. How can we freely give it out?

Let's not reduce application to paid-staff. How can you protect yourself from doing ministry for mixed motives?

Prayer Suggestion

Thank God for the abundance at The Lakes. May Jesus sort out our mixed motives. May we give freely and all the more so as we are deepened in how much we've received.



WEEKEND 04-05 FEBRUARY 2017

SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Read: Matthew 10:16

Plug In...

Jesus gets the Twelve to pause and take stock before simply rushing out the door. They need to know that Jesus is sending them into an environment where there are wolves, and they are sheep. Enough said, for we know what usually happens. This task, this mission, being a worker in the harvest field is dangerous, possibly life-threatening. Therefore, in those moments of conflict, when the battle is on, they must be shrewd as snakes and innocent as doves.

Chew It Over...

As a Christian what animal do you want to represent you? A tiger? A powerful horse? A fun fluffy dog? Jesus says we are sheep amongst wolves. Vulnerable sheep, that get hurt and suffer. We must come to terms that this is the life of a Christian. Reckon with it now before suffering takes place. Authentic Christianity expects this to take place.

How to handle it? Be like a snake, be like a dove. Everyone knows a snake is clever, stealthy. As vulnerable sheep amongst a world of wolves we are being told to be *smart* sheep, not dumb sheep. Yet not so clever that we are evil and cunning. Our smarts are to be godly so that we're innocent.

How do you work out this wisdom for the moment? Ask for it. Study Proverbs. Study Jesus. Imitate Jesus.

Prayer Suggestion

Ask now. James 1:2-5. Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.