

Matthew 9:35-10:8 - Bible Study Handout

Big Idea

Jesus sees the crowds with compassion because they are harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. He doesn't turn away from their pain, confusion, or spiritual hunger. Instead, He tells His disciples to pray for workers and then sends them as part of the answer. Christian mission begins in the compassion of Jesus. We serve because we've first received grace.

Context

- Matthew 8-9 shows Jesus' authority through healing, forgiveness, deliverance, calling, and restoration.
- Matthew 9:35 repeats the ministry pattern from Matthew 4:23: Jesus teaches, proclaims the kingdom, and heals.
- The crowds are "harassed and helpless," meaning they are weary, vulnerable, and poorly shepherded.
- The image of sheep without a shepherd echoes Old Testament concerns about failed leaders and God's promise to care for His people.
- Jesus tells the disciples to pray for workers, then He sends the Twelve into mission.
- Matthew 10 begins with a mission to "the lost sheep of Israel," which later expands to all nations in Matthew 28.
- The disciples receive authority, but the power and mission belong to Jesus.

Key Themes

- Jesus sees people with compassion
- The kingdom is proclaimed and embodied
- Prayer leads to participation in God's work
- Grace calls ordinary people into mission
- Jesus gives authority to serve in His name
- God's mission begins with mercy
- The lost sheep are not forgotten
- Freely received grace becomes freely given grace

Passage Overview

Matthew 9:35 - Jesus' Ministry Pattern

- Jesus travels through towns and villages, teaching in synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing sickness and disease.
- His ministry includes words and action. He teaches truth, announces God's reign, and restores broken lives.
- The kingdom isn't just explained. It's shown through mercy, healing, deliverance, and renewed hope (France).

Matthew 9:36 - Compassion for the Crowds

- Jesus sees the crowds and has compassion on them.
- He doesn't see them as interruptions or problems. He sees beloved people who are tired, pressured, and in need of care.
- "Harassed and helpless" describes people worn down by life and lacking faithful shepherding.
- Jesus' compassion is not shallow pity. It moves Him toward action.

Matthew 9:37-38 - The Harvest and the Workers

- Jesus says, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few."
- The need is great, but the harvest belongs to God.
- Jesus commands the disciples to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send workers.

- Prayer keeps mission from becoming self-reliant. We don't create the harvest. We join the work God is already doing (Keener).

Matthew 10:1 - Authority Given

- Jesus calls the Twelve and gives them authority over impure spirits and every disease and sickness.
- The disciples don't act on their own power. Their authority comes from Jesus.
- Christian ministry still depends on Christ's authority, not our talent, personality, or control.

Matthew 10:2-4 - The Twelve Named

- Matthew lists the twelve apostles: Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot.
- The list is honest and human. It includes fishermen, a tax collector, a zealot, and the one who will betray Jesus.
- Jesus calls ordinary and complicated people into His work.
- Matthew identifies himself as "the tax collector," showing that grace redeems real people with real pasts (Davies and Allison).

Matthew 10:5-6 - Sent to the Lost Sheep of Israel

- Jesus first sends the Twelve to "the lost sheep of Israel."
- This doesn't mean God's grace is only for Israel. Matthew's Gospel already points toward Gentile inclusion.
- The mission begins with Israel because God's covenant promises are being fulfilled in order (France).
- By Matthew 28, the mission expands to all nations.

Matthew 10:7 - The Message of the Kingdom

- The disciples are told to proclaim, "The kingdom of heaven has come near."
- This is the same message Jesus preached.
- They are not sent to create a new message. They are sent to carry His.
- The kingdom has come near because Jesus has come near.

Matthew 10:8 - Freely Give

- Jesus tells the disciples to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with leprosy, and drive out demons.
- These signs show the restoring power of God's kingdom.
- "Freely you have received; freely give" reminds the disciples that ministry is gift before it is task.
- We don't sell mercy, hoard grace, or serve to prove our worth. We serve because Christ has first served us.

Important Observations

- Jesus sees the crowd before He sends the disciples.
- Compassion comes before mission.
- The disciples are told to pray before they are sent.
- The workers are few, but the harvest is plentiful.
- Jesus gives authority, but the mission belongs to God.
- The Twelve are ordinary, imperfect people.
- The mission begins with Israel but points toward all nations.
- Grace received must become grace shared.

Wesleyan Insights

- Prevenient Grace: Jesus sees the crowds and moves toward them before they fully understand

their need. Grace moves first (Collins).

- Prayer and Action: The disciples are told to pray for workers, then they become workers. Prayer opens us to God's heart and sends us into God's work.
- Practical Holiness: The disciples are sent to preach, heal, cleanse, and deliver. Holiness takes visible shape through mercy and service.
- Works of Mercy: Wesley believed love for God must become love for neighbor. This passage shows compassion becoming action.
- Stewardship of Grace: "Freely you have received; freely give" reminds us that ministry is not ownership. It's stewardship.

Life Application

- We need to ask whether we see people the way Jesus sees them.
- Some people around us are harassed and helpless, even if they look fine on the outside.
- The Church is called to be a shepherding community, not a judging crowd.
- Prayer should make us more willing to serve, not less responsible.
- We don't need to be impressive to be useful to God.
- Ministry begins with compassion, not control.
- We've received mercy freely, so we're called to give mercy freely.
- The mission field includes homes, churches, neighborhoods, workplaces, schools, hospitals, jails, and everyday conversations.

Apologetic Reflection

- This passage grounds Christian mission in the compassion of Jesus, not institutional ambition.
- The naming of the Twelve gives the passage historical weight. The list includes flawed people, including Judas, which the early Church would not likely invent to make itself look stronger.
- The mission to Israel fits the covenant story of Scripture. God is faithful to His promises, and His grace later expands to all nations (Wright).
- Christianity takes human suffering seriously. Jesus sees sickness, spiritual oppression, confusion, grief, and exhaustion, and He responds with mercy and authority.
- The hope of the gospel is not that people can save themselves. The hope is that Jesus comes near with grace, power, and compassion.

Details Worth Noticing

- Jesus sees the crowds before He speaks about the harvest.
- "Harassed and helpless" is a deeply pastoral description.
- The disciples are told to ask God for workers before they are sent as workers.
- Jesus gives authority, but He remains the source of the mission.
- Matthew's name appears with the reminder that he was a tax collector.
- Simon the Zealot and Matthew the tax collector would have come from very different political and social worlds.
- The mission begins with "lost sheep," which connects back to Jesus' compassion for sheep without a shepherd.
- "Freely you have received; freely give" protects ministry from pride, greed, and manipulation.

Reflection Questions

1. What does it mean that Jesus saw the crowds with compassion instead of frustration?
2. Where do you see people today who are harassed and helpless?
3. Why do you think Jesus told the disciples to pray for workers before sending them?
4. How does it change ministry when we remember that authority comes from Jesus?
5. What have you freely received from Christ that you need to freely give?

Key Verse

“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” - Matthew 9:36

Cross References

Numbers 27:15-17 • Ezekiel 34:11-16 • Matthew 4:23 • Matthew 28:18-20 • Luke 10:1-12 • John 10:11-16 • Acts 3:1-10 • 2 Corinthians 5:18-20

Takeaway

Matthew 9:35-10:8 shows us the compassion, authority, and mission of Jesus. He sees weary people, calls ordinary disciples, tells them to pray, and sends them to proclaim the kingdom with mercy and power. The Church’s mission still begins here. We’ve received grace freely, so we’re called to give grace freely in the name of Jesus.

Works Cited

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