

The Holy Ministry 2) Demonstrates Compassion

Matthew 9:35-10:8 • 2023-06-18 • Series: The Holy Ministry



Have you ever uncovered a hidden mess? You know how that goes, right? You move a piece of furniture and discover the crumbs. You are guessing by the red and green sprinkles they were left there from last Christmas. Or was it the year before that? It's all too easy to let it remain out of mind and out of sight. When we uncover a mess, we sometimes just like to cover it up again. Or we might even not want to know if it is there. So, we pretend it isn't there. Unfortunately, that is how a lot of people respond to the problems they encounter. And they do this with more than hidden messes. They do it with the bigger issues. While going about his work on this earth, Jesus uncovered a great need: he saw people everywhere who were battered and bruised. We see this very same need today. It's not something insignificant which can somehow remain hidden for 2000 years. It is something which pains the heart. Today we look at that need and ask: How does Jesus respond to the unchurched?

At some time during the middle part of Jesus' three-year ministry he reflected on the state of ancient Israel. He saw it all. After John the Baptist was beheaded, Jesus spent his time going everywhere preaching and teaching. His practice was to travel and teach people everywhere in ancient Israel. He also preached the people in their synagogues. As he preached the good news of the kingdom of heaven, he showed the good compassion of God. He healed every disease and sickness. By this healing he further showed that the kingdom of God was indeed advancing. He spoke the truth.

His travels uncovered a great need and problem. It was one which God knew full well. But now it was a problem which the Son of God now saw first-hand with his own eyes as he met with the people in the flesh. As Jesus walked from place to place, the people he encountered evoked his emotions. They were helpless and without God.

Jesus saw this problem and couldn't overlook it. The heart of God literally ached as he went from town to town and village to village. *He saw that they were harassed and helpless.* Those words carry the concept of beaten and tossed about, battered. Sure, we could reduce the compassion of Jesus to being moved by the pain and suffering the people faced with sickness and disease. And certainly, this was a part of it. But the sickness and disease were just a by-product of the greater problem that loomed over them. They were like sheep without a shepherd. There was no spiritual guidance for the people. Everyone just wandered like a helpless sheep, cut by sin, bruised, and battered.

The spiritual condition of Israel was what really evoked Jesus' emotions. And no wonder, the spiritual condition was not like the problem hidden until you dig for it. It was obvious. The people lived in fear of God. And if not fear of God than ignorance of God. And if not in fear or ignorance of God then in outright defiance of God. Most I'd guess lived with a little fear, mixed with ignorance and defiance.

It's not that the people didn't have someone claiming to be their spiritual shepherds. The Pharisees and teachers of the law were happy to claim authority over them. And they led the people to turn aside from God to a religion of self-gain and works. The people were burdened with guilt for the most mundane things, like man-made laws on how to keep the Sabbath. Meanwhile they were blind of the guilt of more obvious things like lust, divorce, hatred, or love of wealth. And though they had synagogues and synagogue rulers, the truth of Scripture was shrouded and overlooked. They had no real shepherd who cared and could help them. They wandered in sin. When illness came the standard answer was: "You must have sinned." When someone died the only comfort was, "She was probably was good enough for heaven if she worked hard enough." Or they heard the harder to swallow reality without any offer of hope, "He could never be forgiven for what he did." When death struck them, they just stared at it with dumbfounded faces. Go where they may, they were the lost, and unchurched, apart from God and peace, harassed and helpless.

What is most striking about this plight is that these were the people of Israel. God had given them prophets to guide and lead them. God had given them his Holy Word. They people had synagogues where the Scriptures were read each week in public. The temple of the Lord stood in their city, Jerusalem. Still in Israel they had the teachers of the law. The Word of God had been deeply ingrained into their culture of thousands of years. It was the focus of festivals and customs and Sabbaths and synagogues. But sadly, despite all that, *the people were just like sheep without a shepherd.*

Jesus' word and preaching can still be found everywhere today. But does the landscape look any different? Sometimes we might walk away with the impression all is well, the need is addressed. You hear of Christian efforts. You see Christian churches on many corners. We have Bibles in our hotel rooms and free Bibles online. It's easy to just think that there are enough efforts to help everyone. It's easy to overlook the great need of the lost. Satan would gladly have each one of us see no problem, no need. "There is enough spirituality going on, don't worry about anyone."

But you can't overlook or ignore the need today! People are harassed and helpless today. We all still live in a world cursed by sin. We all still face disease and illness. We all still face death. You still see those who are slaves to sin today. They might pretend there is no problem, but the problem is immense. The drug addict may not admit a problem, but he or she has one. The person addicted to porn and sexual immorality might not consider it too big a problem. But it is

a destructive pit which leads to death. The person who can't control their temper might insist there is nothing wrong with them, it's everyone else. But they are indeed part of the problem too. Sin batters and bruises the world.

The solutions that unchurched people seek are not cures. Superstition and witchcraft, Ouija boards and wishing on stars will do no good. They will leave you harassed and helpless. Reading the magazine that will make you popular will not cure the plight of discontent brought by sin. Tips by Maybelline and tricks by the plastic surgeon won't fix the deeper spiritual problems. Turning to lust won't ever satisfy. Mutilating and trying to transform the body won't fix the deeper pains. The false shepherds who counsel, "Do what you think feels right," are leading millions to their death and destruction. The self-help books that godlessly led one to success think success is the answer.

But the lost and helpless are more than the unchurched. They are also those who have a false shepherd. Sheep don't know when their shepherd is misleading them, not until it is too late. Sheep don't know they are about to face danger, not until the danger hits. The unchurched are not simply those who skip going to a church, the unchurched includes all who have shepherds that do not deal with their beaten and battered states.

The lost and unchurched today include the person who goes to a church that does not build on Christ and his Word. I stumbled across a church newsletter from one of the most influential churches in Nigeria that claims to hold mass rivals of Christianity and has large followings. I read through their newsletter devotions curious to see what they were feeding their flock. The spiritual devotions were all centered on what you must do to make God happy. They fed the flock heavy and crushing law with little to no good news. It presented a message that basically told the people if they would give money to the church then they would be blessed. Finally, after scanning across months of newsletters, I understood they were clearly harassing the flock. Even when I stumbled across a devotion based on the Bible entitled, "Depending Entirely on God." I didn't get my hopes up for any good news. Sure enough, that devotion focused not on depending on God for forgiveness but once again centered on doing something by giving back to God. That teaching isn't just found in Nigeria. It comes from large churches in our nation that leave the flocks battered and bruised.

This was the state of the unchurched of Jesus' day, even if they had leaders. No wonder even in ancient Israel Jesus had to say to his disciples, "*The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.*" Many workers were cold and false liars.

There are only two types of responses to such a great plight: Someone might reason, "It's their fault." Or "It's their misguiding shepherd's fault." Or perhaps one might say, "It's too much work, I can't do anything." Or it's not a real problem." These are all really the same type of response to the unchurched: the one which is void of compassion.

The unchurched are lost. The unchurched are harassed and helpless, suffering in sin. The unchurched will remain lost, and will die lost, and will perish forever as lost –because the lost don't find themselves. The lost need a shepherd to guide them. Anything less than at least having concern and a care is of the devil.

Jesus alone shows the truest and only other type of response. "*He had compassion on them.*" He is the God of all compassion and comfort, the God of mercy and love. He saw what caused his heart to ache and he had to act.

But that doesn't mean he simply sees the problem of sin and sweeps it under the rug and says, "Sinners sin. No big deal." Sin is a big deal. And he came to deal with that problem! He came to deal with it in the most compassionate way. It was far from ignoring the problem. His compassion meant giving his everything to deal with the problem!

Jesus has good news for the unchurched. He came to deal with sin by taking on human flesh. He himself went from town to town, synagogue to synagogue teaching, preaching, healing. He himself felt for them, was moved, and noticed their plight. He was never callous or hard. He never ignored the problem. He himself spent the entire night and many times often before praying for the workers. He invites his disciples to pray for workers for this great harvest.

And finally, he wants this work to go on. He sends workers to this harvest. He established the holy ministry to provide faithful shepherds. He sent the twelve to proclaim the good news. He sent seventy-two. He sent them first to Israel and then when he rose again, to all nations.

Their purpose: to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of heaven. The good news is that God cares. His heart breaks for a lost and dying world. He cares so much that he came to deal with it. He came to be the shepherd this world needed, one who would give his life for the sheep. He came to bring and offer up the perfect sacrifice on behalf of all this world: himself. He came to conquer death and rise to life so that we might believe and know we too will rise. He ascended into glory and continues to answer the prayers that workers might go out into his harvest.

How does Jesus respond to the unchurched? Jesus has good news for the unchurched and the lost. He has mercy and compassion for them. He came for them. He sends workers for them, the holy ministry. He wants workers to share that good news to them. He wants your heart to go out to reach the lost.

Pray for the lost. Let your heart go out in compassion for them. Pray for workers. Pray for the holy ministry. They are holy because they have good news and share good news. That good news takes the harassed and helpless from being bruised and battered to being healed with what matters, the compassion of God for the lost.