

This Sunday's texts:

Jeremiah 23:3-8

Acts 2:22-39

Matthew 9:35-10:14

**God's People**

**Pastor Joe Hill**

**January 22, 2023**

The Gospel reading for today is from the gospel of Matthew 9:35 - 10:14:

Jesus went through all of the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When He saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot who betrayed Him. These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give. Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts - no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or staff, for the worker is worth his keep. Whatever town or village you enter, search there for some worthy person and stay at their house until you leave. As you enter the home, give it your greeting. If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet."

This is the Word of the Lord. Good morning and greetings in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ. It's great to be here and worshiping with you today on this third week in our series through the gospel of Matthew, where we are exploring how the story of God's great love for His people extends into the past, again long ago, is fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, and then extends out through Him to the ends of the Earth. As I get started today. I want to remind you about this

companion Bible reading plan that we have going alongside this series through the gospel of Matthew. We're having our Grow Groups go through it and read along. But even if you're not in the Grow Group, it is well worth following along with this Bible reading plan as we go through the gospel of Matthew because our hope for the series isn't just that the sermons would touch your hearts with the message of Jesus Christ, but also that it would add something to your Bible toolkit, that you would feel better equipped and have more confidence as you enter into the Word of the Lord yourselves.

So in the first week of the series, we explored the Good News found in the genealogy, in the lineage of Jesus, that God has been working since the beginning for the salvation of His people, and that he can and does work through broken, imperfect, and sinful people to bring about His will. And this is a plan that is perfected in His Son, Jesus. Last week, Pastor Jim talked about Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount, about how Jesus didn't come to abolish the law or the prophets, but to fulfill them, that He steps into and beyond the ministry of Moses who went up to Mount Sinai and gave the Law, but Jesus, himself, as He goes up onto the mountain, gives a new interpretation, a new understanding of the Law that invites people into God's Kingdom, to a place not just where the letter of the Law would be followed tediously, but that its Spirit would take root in our hearts, not just a place where there wouldn't be murder or adultery or greed, but that the Kingdom of God would be a reality where the very roots of sin are uprooted.

This week, we're going to continue where our Scriptures left off last week, right at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. We're going to go up through this text that we read this morning. So I want to pick up where we left off at the end of the Sermon on the Mount last week. Matthew 7:28-29 said, "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at His teaching, because He taught as One with authority and not as their teachers of the Law." Now, something really helpful in reading the gospel of Matthew is this idea of authority. It doesn't just come up in the Sermon on the Mount or even in the passages we're going to look at today, but a great theme throughout the Gospel of Matthew is the authority by which Jesus does and says and accomplishes what He does. His authority is always tested and in question. And over and over again He proves that His authority is well-founded because it is founded on His heavenly Father in the mission that He gave Him.

If you think about it, the teachings of Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount especially, are incredibly audacious. Now I think sometimes we get so familiar with Jesus, with some of the things in the Scriptures, that the sting, that the shock

and awe of the stuff that He says sometimes is dulled a little bit. Think about it. Moses goes up onto the mountain where he receives a Law directly from the hands of God that he brings back to the people. He says this is what the Lord says to you. And yet Jesus, when He goes up on the mountain, He does something entirely different. The authority by which He establishes His teaching is actually Himself! He says things like this, “You have heard it was said ... do not murder ... but / say to you ...”<sup>1</sup> and so on. Jesus doesn't teach like one of the teachers of the Law or even a messenger of God. Jesus taught like God Himself.

Then He goes on in the subsequent chapters, chapters 8, 9, and 10, to establish His authority and reign, planting the flag of the kingdom of God through signs and wonders. As He does so, He invites people to follow Him, invites them into His kingdom.

Now as you read through Matthew 8 through 10 in this coming week or maybe you did that in the last couple of days, you'll see the theme of authority come up over and over again. Jesus establishes His authority over disease, over sickness. He heals.<sup>2</sup> He casts out demons.<sup>3</sup> He has authority over the spiritual realm. But it's not just that. He also stakes out His claim of authority over creation. When with a word of His mouth, He calms the sea and the wind. Those who are with Him at that moment ask the question, “Who is this? That even the wind and the waves obey Him.”<sup>4</sup>

And it's not just that. Jesus stakes out His authority over sin. A crippled man is brought to Him. What Jesus doesn't say to start is “Stand up. You are healed.” What He says is “your sins are forgiven.”<sup>5</sup> The Pharisees in His presence were flabbergasted. They were furious. Who is this who forgives sins? We all know that the only one who can forgive sin is God.

The truth of the matter is that these stories of Jesus, like the Pharisees thought, they're either lies and blasphemy, or they are God's honest truth and Jesus reigns as the righteous branch of David. Jesus, as He goes about showing His authority, He shows what His kingdom is all about. It's a kingdom of healing, of peace, of grace, and forgiveness. It's a kingdom where people are being invited and formed into the image of the likeness of their King, a kingdom where people have whole and healed relationships with one another and with their God. It's made possible and offered as a free gift to us through Jesus Christ to all who

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 5:21-48

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 8:1-15

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 8:16, Matthew 8:28-32

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 8:23-27

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 9:2

believe. Jesus is the King. He is the king who would lay down His life for His people, rather than lord His authority over them. He was the One who was both the new Moses and, as we'll see later in this series, the Passover Lamb Himself.

So Jesus is out teaching, performing these signs and wonders, establishing in the eyes of the people the authority by which He does what He does. And people are flocking to Him. This ministry is magnetic.

Then we get to our texts today and it says that as these people were coming to Him, "He had compassion on [the crowds] because they were helpless and harassed like sheep without a shepherd."<sup>6</sup> These words struck me really profoundly this week as I was preparing for this message. As I read these words, "harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd," I couldn't help but think what a great description of the culture we live in, of people living harassed and helpless, that they huddle together with people who agree with the things that they already think for safety, looking at everyone who's not in the in-group as the enemy, living in fear of a misstep, of saying or doing the wrong thing, and being caught. Regardless of motivation or intention, if someone is offended by what you say or do, they come after you. This isn't the way of life that flows from people who are secure in their identity as children of God. It comes from people living in fear, living in uncertainty of where they stand before others and where they stand before God. So they pull out their light of judgment and they shine it as brightly as they can on others, clinging to it in the hope that if they are shining it judgmentally enough, if they are zealous enough for their righteous causes, then no one will think to turn the light back on them and they won't have to stand in the light themselves, harassed and helpless.

Yet the Good News of the nearness of the Kingdom of God is that there is a different kind of light altogether. John 1 says that Jesus Himself is the light of this world, is glorious and beautiful and perfect. He shines it and he says that everyone who comes into that light, God sees them. When you step into the light, God sees you, all of you, the parts of you that you really want to hide because you're not sure how others will respond. Yet when you come into the light of Christ, He is not like this world. He does not condemn. He does not demand repentance that you can never repay. But rather He speaks the words found in the prophet Hosea, "This is my child. This is the one I love."<sup>7</sup>

To those who are harassed and helpless, Jesus says the kingdom of God is near and you are invited into it, not just as a subject, but as a son and daughter of

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew 9:36

<sup>7</sup> Hosea 11:1

the King Himself. What this tells me is that you and I, brothers and sisters in Christ, do not need to be ashamed of the message that we carry because it's a message that is going to set captives free. It's going to lift heavy burdens off of the back of people who are harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. And if that's how you feel today, you're carrying that heavy burden, you feel harassed and helpless, weighed down by the burdens of this life, I want to extend to you the invitation to lean into Jesus Christ.

If you open up the pages of the Gospel of Matthew, I believe that you will see a Jesus who has compassion and not contempt for those who are struggling and have lost their way. Jesus has compassion on the crowds and “then He tells His disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send workers out into the field.’”<sup>8</sup> I love what Jesus says right there. It's a little subtle. I love what He says. Because here's what He *doesn't* say, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. So all of you go out and convert as many people as possible.” I don't know who tells that to the church, but it's not Jesus. What Jesus does say is that we can ask God to send out workers into the field because the mission of God is dependent on what *He* does and on *His* power and *His* love, not on what you do.

It says, “Jesus called his twelve disciples to Him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and heal every disease and sickness.”<sup>9</sup> You see that mission that Jesus has been on, bringing healing, bringing the message of the Kingdom of God, now He deputizes His disciples into it. Later in the Gospel of Matthew, He extends that to another seventy-two. Then on the day of Pentecost, as God pours out His Holy Spirit into those people who believe, He gives them the authority, the power, and the message to take up that mission themselves.

When Jesus sends out those twelve, do you remember what He says to them? Don't take an extra shirt or coat. Don't take any extra sandals or walking sticks. I think what He's saying is “I am and will provide for you everything you need to do everything I ask” because the authority of Jesus and the message of the Kingdom is really all we need. Jesus sends out his disciples and us with the authority to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom, that it's near, that the Son of righteousness has risen with healing in its wings.

And here's the beautiful thing about it. Jesus does not and will not ever send you anywhere that He does not already reign as King and have the authority and have victory. The victory is already won and the message of the Kingdom is to

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew 9:37-38

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 10:1

proclaim the victory of our King, that Jesus is victorious over sin and death and the power of the devil, because of His cross and His empty tomb.

Yet Jesus does something interesting in this passage, creating a little tension for us as followers of Jesus. He says I'm going to give you authority and power. I'm going to send you out with My Spirit and you'll actually face rejection. I think that is the thing that so many Christians, myself included, fear when we think about sharing our faith with others. What if I'm rejected? Jesus's words are encouraging to me in a way because remember this. Jesus did everything perfect, didn't make a mistake, didn't sin, and that is why everybody loved him and nobody rejected him, right? No! He was rejected. He never softened His message to make friends. Now I'm not telling you to go out and be a jerk for the Gospel, but what I am telling you is that if you are rejected that is not a sign that you have done something wrong, that you have messed up. The reality is that Jesus tells us to send our peace out and if somebody rejects it, our peace comes right back to us undiminished. Being rejected does not have to steal your peace or crush your spirit. It may actually be a sign that you have done something right because there is always friction between God's kingdom and the ways of this world. Just because someone rejects Jesus, it does not mean that He is not still Lord. And it absolutely does not mean that He's done with them.

Do you remember Paul or Saul? The first time he heard the Gospel, he cheered triumphantly at the martyrdom of the messenger but God wasn't done with him. I actually asked Bishop Dan to preach on this verse at my ordination service back in October. It's one of the most important and meaningful verses in the Bible to me because I took it seriously. Here's what I mean. When Jesus says to ask the lord of the Harvest to send workers into the field, I prayed. I said God I really struggle with what I see in this world around me. It hurts to see so much hurt. It pains me to see so many people in pain, harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. I said, "God, what are you going to do about it? What are you doing? I want you to send workers into that field. And you know what He said?" He said, "Okay, I send you."

I think that when you pray it, He'll do the same thing because we're sent out together. I believe that you know plenty of people who are never going to hear one of my sermons. They're never going to come to hear me or Pastor Jim preach. They may never come to St Timothy's. They might not know Jesus yet. We live in Silicon Valley, which is one of, if not the least, Christian places on Earth. It is entirely possible that you work with someone who you are the only Christian they know, which means that you are their liaison with the Kingdom of Heaven right

now. Pastor Jim and I aren't special because we get to proclaim the message of the Kingdom of God right here at a pulpit, or next to a pulpit, or in a church. Each and every one of us is a part of the body of Christ that matters and as we ask the Lord, "Lord, send us into this world that you already reign in." He says, "I send some of you to preach in churches, and I don't mean this facetiously but it is a lot easier to preach the gospel right here than out there. So if it's hard for you, if it's a struggle, I want you to not be discouraged. Jesus understands and so He's with us. He gives us the power, the Holy Spirit and He says, "I am going to leave you. I'm going to give you opportunities." When the opportunity comes, he says, "Don't worry about what to say." If you look down in verses 19 and 20, so "don't worry about what [you will] say [because] at that time, you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."

Just pray that God would give you the opportunity and I think we both know how He'll answer. The good news is that we are carriers of the Good News, that we've been invited to live in the King's kingdom, not just as His subjects, but as His children. Jesus is a reminder that our heavenly Father sends out His children to speak the Good News, that love has won, that sins are forgiven, and that relationships are healed and made whole, that all things are being made new through Jesus Christ, that the heavy burden is lifted because a new King reigns. He invites and sends and empowers us to spread the Good News of that Kingdom, of the nearness of that Kingdom to those who are harassed and helpless, that He is a God who is near to the broken, the hurting, the sinful, And that the invitation is open to come to the King's table to be, not just a citizen of His Kingdom, but a child of the King.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we pray for faith. God, the faith to trust You. Lord, the faith to take You at Your word that You will do what You have said You'll do, and that You are faithful to all of Your promises. Lord, we gather together as the people of God and say, Lord, we pray that You would send workers out into the field, into our families, our neighborhoods, our schools, and workplaces with the message that the King reigns and that that is Good News for all people. Lord, we pray today in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen