

Matthew 9:35-10:5a

Introduction

We remember that when Matthew wrote his gospel, he included five major “discourses” of Jesus with other narrative/story material “sandwiched” in between (see the Outline of Matthew). So after the “narrative story” of Matthew 1-4 (describing Jesus’ birth and the beginnings of His public ministry), we get the sermon of Matthew 5-7 (the “Sermon on the Mount”). After the sermon of Matthew 5-7, we get the collection of miracle *stories* in chapters 8-9. And now we are ready for another “sermon” (10:5-42). But first, Matthew gives us a *very important* “introduction” to the sermon. That’s what we’ll be looking at in this study.

I. Verse 35 – 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.

This verse is almost word for word the same as Matthew 4:23.

✓ Matthew 4:23 – And he went throughout all Galilee, *teaching* in their synagogues *and proclaiming* the gospel of the kingdom (word, 5-7) *and healing* every disease and every affliction among the people (deed, 8-9).

And so we have here a concluding summary of the last five chapters as well as a transition to the next section of Matthew’s gospel.

✓ Matthew 4:23-5:2 – And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. *Seeing the crowds*, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, *his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them*, saying...

✓ 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. *When he saw the crowds*, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then *he said to his disciples*...

II. Verse 36a – When he saw the crowds...

Who are these crowds? Well first of all, they represent God’s chosen people. And yet it is precisely this “chosen people” who have turned away from God and broken the covenant. So when Jesus sees the crowds as He moves “throughout all *the cities* and villages”, He sees God’s unfaithful, unbelieving people. In fact, it won’t be long before He will “denounce *the cities* where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent” (11:20). So far, the crowds have been astonished at His *teaching* (7:28) and marveled at His *deeds* (9:33), but they have refused to *believe*. So as Jesus looks out and surveys God’s unfaithful, unbelieving people, we might expect some harsh words of rebuke as He is filled up with righteous anger and wrath. In just a little bit, Jesus will say to His disciples:

- ✓ Matthew 10:14-15 – If anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.

It is in the face of these realities that the next five words can truly be seen in all their wonderful grandeur and beauty.

III. Verse 36a-b – When he saw the crowds, *he had compassion for them...*

Compassion. The Greek word for compassion is a visceral kind of “gut” word. “No single English [word] does justice to it: compassion, pity, sympathy, and fellow feeling all convey part of it, but ‘his heart went out’ perhaps represents more fully the emotional force of the underlying metaphor of a ‘gut response.’” (France) Maybe we can more fully understand this compassion of Jesus by comparing it with Old Testament descriptions of *God’s* compassion for His people.

- ✓ Isaiah 63:15 – *The stirring of your inner parts and your compassion...*
- ✓ Hosea 11:8 – How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? ... *My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender.*

When Jesus had compassion for the crowds, it was an expression of *God’s* compassion for His rebellious people. In Jesus’ compassion, we see the stirring of God’s inner parts, we see God’s pity growing warm and tender. What a beautiful picture! And yet God’s dealings with His people have not always been characterized by this compassion.

- ✓ Isaiah 63:15 – The stirring of your inner parts and your compassion *are held back from me.*
- ✓ Hosea 1:6-9 (cf. Jer. 13:13-14; 16:5) – The LORD said to [Hosea], “Call her name No Mercy, for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all... When she had weaned No Mercy, she conceived and bore a son. And the LORD said, “Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God.”

In the judgment of the exile, God cast His people off and abandoned them to the nations. But these days of “no mercy” were only to be a momentary thing. One day, God would again be compassionate toward His people.

- ✓ Isaiah 54:6-8 (Mic. 7:18-20; Lam. 3:31-33) – For the LORD has called you like a wife deserted and grieved in spirit, like a wife of youth when she is cast off, says your God. For a brief moment I deserted you, but *with great compassion I will gather you.* In overflowing anger for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,” says the LORD, your Redeemer.

IV. Verse 36a-c – When [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, *because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*

The Greek word for harassed originally meant “flayed” or “skinned” (Baur) and “helpless” is literally “thrown down.” So Jesus sees that the crowds were “torn and thrown down” (Blomberg) or “mangled and thrown to the ground” (Berkeley; quoted in Blomberg). They were like helpless

sheep whose shepherds had abandoned them to be attacked and harassed by wild beasts. The spiritual leaders of Israel were completely failing to shepherd the flock and to gather God's people in to good pasture. When Jesus sees that God's people were "mangled and thrown down to the ground", like sheep without a shepherd, He undoubtedly has in His mind the vivid imagery of Ezekiel.

- ✓ Ezekiel 34:1-6 – Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered, because ***there was no shepherd***, and ***they became food for all the wild beasts***. My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.

The failure of the shepherds had led to the sheep being scattered by God in the judgment of exile (cf. Ezek. 33:21-22; Jer. 31:10). And so they wandered now among the nations as food for all the wild beasts with no one to search or seek for them. Would God be angry forever, or would his anger ever give way to compassion?

- ✓ Ezekiel 34:11-16, 30-31 (cf. Isaiah 40:9-11) – Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and ***I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered*** on a day of clouds and thick darkness. And ***I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land***. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel... I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak. And they shall know that I am the LORD their God with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, declares the Lord GOD. And you are my sheep, human sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, declares the Lord GOD.”
- ✓ Zechariah 10:2-3, 6 – The people wander like sheep; they are afflicted for lack of a shepherd. “My anger is hot against the shepherds, and I will punish the leaders; for the LORD of hosts cares for his flock, the house of Judah... “I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph. ***I will bring them back because I have compassion on them***, and they shall be as though I had not rejected them, for I am the LORD their God and I will answer them.
- ✓ Jeremiah 23:1-3 – “Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!” declares the LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: “You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the LORD. Then ***I will gather the remnant of my flock*** out of all the countries where I have driven them, and ***I will bring them back to their fold***, and they shall be fruitful and multiply.

As Jesus looked out upon the crowds of God's unfaithful and rebellious people, they had already been back in the land for over five hundred years (Ezra and Nehemiah). In one sense, they had already been gathered in. And yet Jesus still compared them to sheep without a shepherd. Jesus still likened God's people to those who have been mangled and thrown down and scattered by wild beasts. God has gathered His sheep back to the land, but there still remains an even *more important* "gathering" that needs to take place. This spiritual gathering was the whole point and goal of Israel's physical regathering. The physical regathering of Israel was the picture and shadow of the much greater and more glorious ingathering that was to take place in the age of the kingdom. And this spiritual ingathering of Israel pointed, in turn, to the ultimate regathering of all Israel into the heavenly Zion and new Jerusalem. But it was this *spiritual* ingathering that Jesus accused Israel's religious leaders of having utterly failed to accomplish.

God said, "I will bring them back because I have compassion on them"... And here is Jesus, God in the flesh, looking upon the crowds with *compassion*. Here is Jesus, the one who says, according to Isaiah 49:5:

✓ Isaiah 49:5; cf. Ezek. 34:23 – The LORD... formed me from the womb to be his servant, *to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him.*

When Jesus looked out upon God's unfaithful people and saw their miserable and helpless plight, His inner parts were stirred, and His compassion grew warm and tender. It was *time* – time to gather the people in. It was time to bring the harassed and scattered sheep back to the fold.

V. Verses 37-38 – Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

The sheep scattered in exile are now pictured as a vast harvest of ripe grain that is ready to be gathered in. And so we see that the age of the kingdom is the age of *mission*. The age of the kingdom is the age of gathering in the harvest and bringing the scattered sheep into the fold.

"The harvest is *plentiful*", Jesus says, "but the laborers are *few*; therefore pray *earnestly* to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." When Jesus says to pray *earnestly*, we get the picture that the need is urgent. I think of vast fields of ripe grain with a limited window of time for the harvest and not yet enough workers to do the job. The work of evangelism and missions, the work of gathering in the harvest is an *urgent* business and so Jesus exhorts us to pray *earnestly* for more laborers. I think we certainly lack a healthy sense of this urgency. Our hearts easily grow dull so that we don't feel the pressing *need*. We are strangers to the compassion of Jesus. But if we could feel the compassion of Jesus, if we could see the sheep as being mangled and thrown to the ground and scattered about as food for the wild beasts, then we might be more in earnest about the harvest. Why should we be content to simply watch them in their miseries for even one day longer – and especially when there are so *many*?

We see the urgent and pressing need for laborers to gather in the waiting harvest. But we can also take comfort in the ultimate knowledge that the harvest *will* be gathered in. The harassed

and scattered sheep *will* be brought into the fold in fulfillment of God's purpose and many promises in the Old Testament. Our urgent prayers are not the result of frantic desperation. They are not the result of worry and anxiety that some of the harvest will be missed and that people who were otherwise ripe to be gathered in will perish forever. After all, notice to *whom* it is that we earnestly pray! We pray to the *Lord* of the harvest to send out laborers into *his* harvest. This is not our harvest, it's God's harvest! We are not the ones *ultimately* responsible for the harvest, God is! He is *Lord* of the harvest – He is the Master and overseer of the harvest operation – and so we can be assured that the harvest is safe with Him. He can be counted on to answer our earnest prayers and send out laborers sufficient for the harvest. So let us pray, and pray earnestly – because we know that the need is *urgent and* because we know that God is *faithful*. We live in the age of the kingdom, and the age of the kingdom *is* the age of the harvest – the spiritual ingathering of God's people. But Jesus doesn't just have compassion, and He doesn't just tell the disciples to earnestly pray...

VI. Verses 1-5a – And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction. The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. These twelve Jesus sent out...

True compassion and true earnest prayer always leads to sending and to going. This is the very first time that Matthew refers to the twelve disciples. And of course, he not only refers to twelve disciples in general, but he identifies each one of the twelve by name. Mark and Luke are also careful to provide a list of the names of the twelve disciples. We might think that where three different authors reproduce the same list of twelve names, we would know a good deal about the people on the list. But the fact is, we know next to nothing about *most* of the twelve disciples. Except for their names, they remain largely anonymous. So what's the big deal about the twelve disciples? Well, the emphasis is not so much on their names, or on who they are, but on their *number* – *twelve*. After the death of Judas, the eleven remaining apostles cast lots to restore their number to twelve (Acts 1:15-26). And even when there were only eleven disciples, Paul still referred to them as "the twelve" (1 Cor. 15:5; cf. Mat. 28:16). So what's the big deal about twelve? We can clearly see the importance of the number twelve in connection with the twelve tribes of Israel (compare Matthew 10:1-4 with Numbers 1:4-15). **Just as the *scattered* Israel of the Old Covenant was composed of twelve tribes, so now the *gathered* Israel of the New Covenant will be built upon the foundation of twelve Jewish apostles.**

- ✓ Revelation 21:12, 14 – [The new Jerusalem] had a great, high wall, with twelve gates... and on the gates *the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed*... And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and *on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb*.
- ✓ Matthew 19:28 – Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

And those who are said to judge the twelve tribes of Israel are one and the same with those who are the foundation of the Church (Eph. 2:19-20). So in the naming of the twelve disciples, we have a picture of the new and recreated Israel, the promised new covenant community, the brand new people of the kingdom. And it's *into* this new creation that the mangled, and helpless, and lost sheep of the house of Israel are to be gathered. Put yourself in the shoes of the Jewish Christians in Matthew's church and imagine how they would have felt. What awe! What gratitude! What joy! *And* what responsibility! Because they see that the kingdom harvest (so joyfully foretold by the Old Testament prophets) still continues. And they learn here from Matthew that **this** harvest is to be accomplished in and through the *church*. Contrary to Mark and Luke (Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16), Matthew skips the *calling* of the twelve and waits to name the twelve disciples until the day that Jesus sends them out into the harvest (cf. Mark 6:7-13; Luke 9:1-6). And this sending of the twelve sets the precedent and pattern for the church. As the apostles are sent out, so the church is sent out to reap the harvest and gather in the scattered sheep.

I asked you to put yourself in the shoes of the Jewish Christians in Matthew's church and imagine how they would have felt. But what about us? What about Gentiles? Do we have any place in this new and recreated Israel that is built upon the foundation of twelve Jewish apostles?

- ✓ Matthew 10:5-6 – These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

Based on this verse alone, someone could easily wonder if Jesus' compassion extended to the Gentiles. Was there no harvest to be reaped among the Gentiles? Were there no scattered and helpless and lost sheep among the Gentiles that needed to be gathered in? Well, there can be absolutely no doubt as to the answer.

- ✓ Isaiah 49:5-6 – And now the LORD says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him...: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”
- ✓ Isaiah 56:6-8 – “The foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant— these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” The Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares, “I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered.”
- ✓ John 10:16 – I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

And then one day, God will bring about the final regathering of His true and recreated Israel (made up of Jews and Gentiles alike) into the New Jerusalem – the city that is home to every one of God's people from Abel, to Noah, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to Ruth, to David, to John

the Baptist, *and also* to all of *us*. In that day, the harvest will be completed, and the final ingathering of God's people accomplished! This will be the final fulfillment of God's word through Ezekiel and of the work that Jesus began while He was here on earth.

Conclusion

Brothers and sisters, isn't it a wonderful thing to think about Jesus' compassion for us? Yes, we were vile and guilty sinners, but Jesus didn't only see this! Jesus saw us in our misery. He saw us as mangled, helpless sheep without any shepherd to gather us in. He didn't have to see us this way, but He did. And as Jesus looked upon *us*, His inner parts were stirred, and His compassion grew warm and tender. Can you possibly imagine? – That we who deserved God's wrath should actually elicit the deepest stirrings of His inner parts and His warm and tender compassion? This is boundless mercy! This is fathomless love! What assurance that our salvation is secure! Let us know, then, how God looks at us. Let's always be growing more and more familiar with this *compassion* that *moved* Jesus to gather us in.

And then we must also learn to see the crowds as Jesus saw them – as full of lost, and harassed, and helpless sheep. And as we see them in this light, may *our* inner parts be stirred and may *our* compassion grow warm and tender. And may this growing compassion within us cause us to *pray earnestly* to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. And as we pray in this way, we will always find God answering this prayer through *us*. Because whether as the senders or as the sent ones (and to a certain extent, all Christians are both the senders and the sent), *we* are called to labor in the harvest. And here is wonderful news. As we are moved with compassion for the people around us, and as we pray earnestly for laborers, and as we ourselves go out and labor in the harvest, we can do all of these things with *confidence and joy*, knowing that there *is* indeed a harvest and knowing that the harvest is God's. He is *Lord of His* harvest! As we labor in *His* harvest, *He* will be faithful to grant the increase and ultimately to gather in every last one of His scattered sheep (Acts 18:9-10; 2 Tim. 2:8-10).

We live now in the age of the kingdom. And in fulfillment of God's word through the prophets, the age of the kingdom is the age of the harvest. *Now* we're ready for the sermon. Now we're ready for Jesus' instructions to the disciples—and ultimately to the church—as they head out into the harvest.

Teaching our Children

- Q.** In the Old Testament, who are God’s “sheep” (God’s people)?
- A.** In the Old Testament, God’s “sheep” are the people of Israel.
- Q.** Sheep need shepherds, but the shepherds of God’s people Israel were not taking care of the sheep. What happens when shepherds stop watching over the sheep?
- A.** The sheep are easily attacked and torn by wild beasts. They are scattered far away from the pasture.
- Q.** How did this very thing happen to Israel when their shepherds (leaders) stopped caring for them and leading them into God’s ways?
- A.** Israel was attacked by foreign nations and then scattered among the nations, and there was no shepherd to search for them and bring them back (See Ezekiel 34:1-6; top of page 3).
- Q.** Did Israel deserve these bad shepherds? Did God’s sheep deserve to be scattered?
- A.** Yes! Very much so! They had rebelled against God.
- Q.** God promised that one day instead of anger and wrath, He would show His people *what*?
- A.** God promised that one day He would show His people *compassion*.
- Q.** What is compassion?
- A.** See Isaiah 63:15 and Hosea 11:8 and discuss (and be amazed! – top of page 2)
- Q.** What would God’s compassion for His people cause Him to do?
- A.** God’s compassion for His scattered and helpless sheep would cause Him to gather them back into the fold and bring them back to their own land (See Scriptures on bottom of page 3).
- Q.** God’s purpose was not just to gather His sheep back to the land. He had in mind a much more important “gathering” than this. What was this more important “gathering”?
- A.** God’s purpose was to gather His sheep back to *Himself* so that they would truly be His people and He would truly be their God (See Isaiah 49:5; top of page 4).
- Q.** When Jesus saw the crowds (God’s rebellious and unfaithful sheep), what did He feel?
- A.** Jesus felt *compassion* for the people! (Remember God’s promises in the Old Testament)
- Q.** Why did Jesus feel compassion for the people? When He looked at the crowds what did He see?
- A.** Jesus felt compassion for the people because they were mangled/torn and thrown to the ground – just like sheep without a shepherd. God’s sheep were still scattered. They still needed to be gathered in.
- Q.** In light of the need for God’s sheep to be gathered in, what did Jesus tell His disciples to pray for?
- A.** Jesus told His disciples to pray earnestly that God would send out workers into the harvest.
~ They were to pray earnestly because there was a very large harvest to be gathered in, but not very many workers. The need was very urgent!
- Q.** The need is very urgent, but we don’t need to be frightened or worry. Why can we trust in God as we pray earnestly for workers?
- A.** We can trust God because the harvest is *His*. He is the *Lord* of the harvest and so He will be faithful to make sure that the harvest is gathered in.
- Q.** Jesus didn’t just tell the disciples to pray for more workers in the harvest. What else did Jesus do?
- A.** Jesus *sent* His disciples to go out and *work* in the harvest!
- Q.** If we truly have compassion (like Jesus did) and if we are truly praying for workers, what will we be willing to *do*?

A. We will be willing to work in God's harvest. We will work to *send* others, and we will be willing to *go* ourselves.

Q. In the Old Testament, God's sheep were the people of Israel. Does God have any other sheep among the Gentiles? Is there also a harvest to be reaped among the Gentiles?

A. YES! (See Scriptures on bottom of page 6)

- ✓ We live in the time of the kingdom. And the time of the kingdom is the time of the harvest when God's scattered sheep are being gathered in.
- ✓ Take time to rejoice in God's wonderful and amazing compassion – that He should look at sinners and His inner parts be stirred and grow warm and tender!
- ✓ Let us look for ways to be God's workers in the harvest.