“IN THE KING’S SERVICE”

As we come to the end of Matthew Chapter 9 Jesus is at the height of His popularity. We know from all the way back in Chapter 4 that “great crowds followed Him from Galilee…Jerusalem, Judea and beyond the Jordan River” (4:25). We know from Matthew 8:1 that “great crowds followed Him” (when He came down from the mountain). We know that Jesus was going about in all Galilee teaching in the synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 4:23). After His incredible Sermon on the Mount the people were amazed at His teaching for He spoke with authority (Matthew 7:28-29). We know that Jesus had an incredible healing ministry. He was healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people…They brought to Jesus “those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics and paralytics, and He healed them” (Matthew 4:24). Matthew records specifically nine of Jesus miracles in Chapters 8 and 9. We looked at three of these in detail last week. And we know that this was just a small sample of Jesus miracles. We know Jesus did a lot more than what the gospel writers tell us. John says, “There are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25). Jesus is drawing great crowds and has quite a following and many disciples.

But like I pointed out last week, Jesus is not doing all this to be popular or to become famous (9:31). He does all this to show that He is from God and, in fact, that He IS God. There’s a reason why Jesus teaches with such authority – why He makes the tough claims that He makes – why He should be believed and followed – because He’s God! Again, John records the reason for all of Jesus’ signs and wonders – “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you many have life in His name” (John 20:31). So Jesus had many followers and disciples. However, not everyone believed in Him. Not everyone bought into His claim to be the Messiah King, the Son of God sent from His Father. Matthew 9:33-34 says, “And the crowds marveled saying, ‘Never was anything like this seen in Israel.’ But the Pharisees said [here is their conclusion after being presented with all the evidence], “He (Jesus) casts out demons by the prince of demons.” In their willful unbelief they said Jesus did what He did by the power of Satan. He wasn’t from God but He was from hell. How could these religious leaders be so wrong about Jesus? Because they were themselves blinded by Satan. I find it very interesting that one of the Pharisees’ very own, a man named Nicodemus, came to a completely different conclusion about Jesus. Listen to what he says to Jesus: “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him” (John 3:2).

So that’s where we pick up today’s lesson…READ Matthew 9:35-38.

Verse 35 tells us that Jesus is doing the same thing He did back in Chapter 4. The three aspects to His ministry are: (1) Jesus is teaching in the synagogues – He’s reading and then expounding on the meaning of the O.T. scriptures, the Law and the Prophets; (2) Jesus is proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom – the good news of salvation – God has a kingdom and those who enter His kingdom will receive a great blessing; (3) Jesus is healing – He’s literally touching people right where they hurt – He’s demonstrating in a very real and practical way God’s love, compassion, kindness and mercy.

Jesus, we are told, was going to all the cities and villages. According to Josephus at the time of Christ there were about 3 million people living in Galilee in approximately 200 villages and cities. So this was a pretty significant ministry.

In verse 36 Matthew gives us insight into Jesus’ heart. Jesus cared deeply about people. I went through my Strong’s Concordance and looked up how many times the word “compassion” is used with Jesus in the gospels: Here is the first one (Matt 9:36). Matt 14:14 “he saw a great crowd and he had compassion on them,” Matt 15:32 “I have compassion on the crowd,” Matt 20:34 “Jesus in pity touched their eyes,” Mark 1:41 “moved with pity he stretched out his hand and touched him,” Luke 7:13 “and when the Lord saw her he had compassion on her.” The Greek word means “to be moved in one’s inward parts.” Today we would say “He was moved in His gut.” The Jews talked about that inward seat of one’s feelings and thoughts being the heart. We do the same thing. Today we would say something like this on Valentine’s Day: “I love you with ALL of my heart.” It’s just a way of expressing feelings that run deep into one’s core. What you need to understand is that Jesus’ feelings for the people of Israel ran deep within Him. Jesus was God and so He had the heart of God for His people. John MacArthur said it this way: “Jesus cared because God is love – and love cares.”

Verse 36 goes on to say why Jesus had compassion on the people. It was not so much because of their physical condition, but because of their spiritual condition. The ESV says “because they were harassed and helpless.” I prefer the NASV choice of the word “distressed” rather than harassed. The word “helpless” here is good. So because of a lack of spiritual leadership by the scribes and Pharisees who had established a false religious system, the people were like sheep without a shepherd. They were spiritually lost. In fact in 10:6 Jesus calls them “the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” So Jesus sees the people as distressed and helpless. They were desperate for a shepherd to lead them, a Savior to save them. And when you get right down to it that’s the whole reason why Jesus came – “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). So when Jesus sees the crowds He feels deep compassion for them.

Oh, and by the way, Jesus calls us as His followers, as Christians to be compassionate also. Back in verse 13 of Matthew Chapter 9 Jesus, quoting from the O.T. book of Hosea, says, “I desire compassion and not sacrifice.”

So Jesus as He considers the lost condition of His people turns to His disciples…READ Matthew 9:37-38. You see the word “harvest” mentioned three times in these verses. What do you think the word “harvest” is referring to?

Two possible interpretations… #1 is based on Jesus teaching in Mark 4:26-29 (the parable of the seed growing secretly). Jesus teaches that God is at work in individual hearts. When the time is right God reaps the harvest and saves that person. In John 4:35 Jesus and His disciples are in Samaria and He sees the townspeople coming out to meet Him. Jesus tells His disciples, “Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. People are ready to receive the Gospel and to respond to it in saving faith. So there will be a harvest of salvation.

But there is one other possible interpretation…#2 is based on Jesus teaching in Matthew 13:24-30 (the parable of the wheat and tares). Here the harvest represents a final day of judgment when true believers and false deceivers will be systematically separated out. So there will be a harvest of judgment and damnation for those who do not believe.

In a sense both interpretations are OK. The lost are damned in their current condition, but God is at work in their hearts. If they respond in faith then they will be saved. This is why laborers are needed – to sow the seed, to get the gospel message out and then at some point to reap a harvest of souls primed and ready to respond in faith. Those who reject the gospel will be harvested in judgment later by the Lord of the harvest.

In verse 38 Jesus tells His disciples to pray for laborers and then in Chapter 10 He makes them the answer to their own prayer. So with that Jesus calls His twelve disciples. These are the men who will help Jesus out in His earthly ministry. They will be and extension of Him while He is on earth and then they will be the ones who establish His church later. They are the original missionaries that Jesus trains and then sends out. READ Matthew 10:1. Jesus gives His disciple the power and authority to do what He has been doing – to cast out evil spirits and to heal various diseases. Remember this is before Pentecost so the Holy Spirit has not yet been poured out on believers. The twelve need God’s mighty power if they are going to be able to meet both the physical and spiritual needs of the people. So Jesus equips them in v. 1 and then sends them out in v. 5.

Matthew lists the names of Jesus’ Twelve disciples in the next few verses. We know that Jesus had disciples as early as Chapter 4 and we know from Mark 1 and Luke 5 that the first disciples He called were Simon (Peter) and Andrew his brother, and the sons of Zebedee, James and John. So these two sets of brothers are who Matthew lists first. John 1 says the following day came Philip and Nathaniel (most scholars believe this is the same as Bartholomew). Then, shortly thereafter, Jesus called Matthew (also known as Levi). We are not sure exactly when Jesus called the rest of the Twelve. We know that at one point Jesus actually appointed seventy who He then sent out in teams of two ahead of Him. Luke records this in Luke Chapter 10. Jesus’ statement to the seventy in Luke 10:2 sounds a lot like what He says at the end of Matthew Chapter 9. My point is that we know Jesus has a lot more than twelve disciples following Him at this point in His ministry. But here Jesus chooses twelve men specifically who will commit themselves full time to Him. READ Matthew 10:2-4.

Briefly mention diversity of this group united by a single purpose.

READ Matthew 10:5-8. Here we see the task of the Lord’s missionary workers. They are to be His representatives. Notice that they are called, commissioned. They didn’t volunteer. They were sent under orders by the King. Here He gives specific instructions for that time only. It is a very focused and limited mission. Jesus gave His disciples a clear objective. Focus your efforts on the house of Israel, the Jews. Later He would take the message to the Samaritans and Gentiles, but for now focus on their own.

Next notice He gives them their message – “the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” This is the same message Jesus has been preaching up to this point. See Matthew 4:17 and Mark 1:15. It was the same message John the Baptist had preached back in Chapter 3. Discuss what this message meant. Maintain your mission focus and keep your message clear and concise. And as Christ’s missionaries we are to do the same thing. The Gospel message is life-changing but keep it simple, don’t complicate it with a lot of other stuff. “The preacher is not a chef; he's a waiter. God doesn't want you to make the meal; He just wants you to deliver it to the table without messing it up. That's all. We are servants under divine commission.”

Finally don’t forget to meet their physical needs and do it without pay.

Application: We too have been given a divine commission. As followers of the King we are to be obedient to the task the King has given us. So what is our divine mandate? “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you – and lo I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”