

June 12, 2005
Pentecost 4

"Jesus' Compassion for the Lost"

MATTHEW 9:35-38

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

"When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." The word compassion means, "sorrow for the suffering or trouble of others with an urge to help." In the original Greek language the word literally means to have your internal organs of body moved around. This accurately describes how we feel when we have deep compassion for someone. It hits us not here in the heart, but here, "in the pit of the stomach."

How you ever seen a dog running down a busy road or even the freeway? There is the sickening feeling in your stomach that it is only a matter of time before a car strikes the dog and it dies? Does it ever bother you that there can be times in our lives when we have stronger feelings and emotions for an animal that is lost and is about to be killed than we do for people who will perish forever without Jesus.

This morning we want to look at Jesus as he is moved deeply when a large crowd of people gathers around him. We want the same feelings or compassion he had for people to be found also in us. We want to listen to Jesus as he encourages us to pray for people who will go into the harvest field and seek the lost before they perish forever. Let's take a closer look at **"Jesus Compassion for the Lost."**

1) Look at the compassion on the face of Jesus

Compassion and love is written all over the face of Jesus as he enters the towns and villages. It says, "Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness." Jesus had compassion on the people who were sick and diseased. He tenderly reached out to heal them with the power he has as Lord and God. The same love and compassion is still there in Jesus when we use the power of prayer to ask him to come and heal people and help them with their problems such as we have been doing again this past week.

Jesus did so much more for people, far beyond just the healing of their sicknesses or providing them with food to eat. "He taught in their synagogues and preached to them the good news of the kingdom of God." The greatest news that human ears can ever hear is the news that Jesus is who he says he is, Lord and God from all eternity, the Son of God, and the Son born to Mary and Joseph, fully human and fully God. The best name your ears can hear is the name of Jesus. The best information that can ever come across the path

of your life is the news that Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords who wants to rescue you from the kingdom of darkness into which you were born. The message Jesus brought into the towns and villages was the same simple message he gave to Nicodemus in John 3, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."

Jesus had compassion on the people. He sought them out the way a shepherd seeks out the lost sheep that are destined to perish if they are not under the control and care of the loving Shepherd. "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." It does not say that they looked like sheep that were harassed and helpless. It says they were harassed and helpless. That word "harassed" is a strong word used for tearing flesh or skin from the body. The person who does not know who Jesus is like a lost sheep that is being ripped apart and attacked by wild animals. This past week a twelve-year old boy was viciously attacked by the family pit bull and killed in his own bedroom. That kind of vicious attack is suggested by the words, "harassed and helpless." The cat meowing helpless in the open field is no match for the coyote, nor is the sheep that is separated from the shepherd any match for the wild animals, nor can any human being ever hope to escape the judgment to come without Jesus.

As I tell this personal story, I want you to think of your own personal story. Think of a time when you had compassion you had for an animal that was dying. I was about ten years old, one summer day, walking along the river on the family farm. I was picking up stones, skipping some, and throwing others across to the bank on the other side. I saw a bird, a little water bird, half grown, sitting on a rock in the middle of the river. I threw the stone hoping to scare it away and watch it fly. The stone did not scare the bird, instead it hit the bird, and the bird fell over with its feet sticking up in the air, kicking and dying. The kicks became slower and the twitching less sudden. The little bird died, and a terrible feeling came to the pit of my stomach. That is compassion. If we have compassion for animals that die, we want to have an even greater compassion for people who are lost forever without Jesus. That is the kind of compassion we see on the face of Jesus and a compassion we want to see on our faces week after week as we gather together to encourage others in our faith and also be concerned about the lost.

An elderly man was taking his daily walk in a small country town. He noticed a boy with a bird inside of a rusty old cage. "Young man," he said, "What are you going to do with that sparrow you have captured?" With a sinister look in his eyes and a laugh in his voice he said, "I am going to tease it with this stick and take it home and then feed it to my cat." "How much do you want for the bird?" asked the old man. "Five dollars and not a penny less," said the greedy boy. The man pulled out a crisp five dollar bill and gave it to the boy. He took the bird and the rusty cage to an open field and let the bird go free.

You and I were born in the cage of sin, without God and without hope. We were born under Satan's domain. He tormented us every day and made sin appear to be something delightful and fulfilling. He drove us further from God and deeper into despair. Then Jesus came to deliver us by paying the price for our redemption. "Not with gold or silver but with his holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death" he redeemed us. As our verse in Romans 5 said, "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly." Look at the face of Jesus once again this morning and see the compassion

he had for the people that came to him, the same compassion that he had for you when he gave his life for you, and reached out to bring you into his loving arms by working faith for you. That's the compassion he wants us to have, the same compassion mentioned in Ezekiel 34, "My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth."

2) Listen as he asks us to pray

We see the compassion of the face of Jesus. Now let's listen to the compassion in Jesus' voice as he encourages his followers of every age to pray for workers in his field to rescue the lost before it is too late. "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.'"

Notice the field of ripened grain on the front cover of your bulletin. The situation is urgent. The Kansas farmers call in the large machines to cut the wheat and separate it from its heads. Machines will work around the clock to get in the wheat, because when it ripens it can break loose from the stalk and be lost to the ground. At Jesus' time, large numbers of people cut the grain by hand, gathered them into bundles and took them to the threshing floor where the precious grain was taken from the stalk. Lots of workers were needed in the fields to get the job done before the grain was lost.

Jesus is speaking to his disciples of every age and asking them to pray for workers to go out into the field and gather in people before they die or before the end of the world comes. Our congregation has been devoting itself to prayer asking the Lord to open up doors to proclaim the gospel in our community. Do we not need to listen to Jesus ask us this morning to pray for people to go into the harvest field? Let's not just think of pastors in the churches or the missionaries in the fields. Let's think of people here in our midst whom the Lord raises up to witness to others about Jesus. Some of the best workers in the field are those who are working and going to school and being neighbors to the people around them.

Perhaps an illustration might help here. A lady was on her way home for lunch break, and she noticed two children selling Kool-Aid on the street corner near her home for 25 cents a glass. She ordered a glass and she gave them a dollar. They brought the change back and then asked if they might have the paper cup back, because all they had was on paper cup and they needed to sell more Kool-Aid. Jesus was not telling the disciples to pray for a one-cup ministry. If we pray that the Lord would raise up people from among us who are willing and eager to share the gospel with the lost and give them a compassion for the lost, who knows how many opportunities might arise for bringing the message of salvation and peace with God with those still wandering around like lost sheep, harassed and helpless.

Think about yourself and a friend in your congregation openly sharing with each other the opportunities the Lord is giving you to plant the seed of his Word in the lives of other people. You support each other in prayer, and ask the Lord to give your friend the right words to say, and ask for open doors to speak about Jesus and simply share the love of the shepherd for lost sheep as Jesus did when he went from village to village. You

pray for each other to have the Lord open your eyes to more opportunities to bring the gospel to every creature. One of our members told me recently with deep conviction in her voice, "Pastor we just need to pray more for opportunities." One of these greatest venues for proclaiming the gospel is the resource of people we have right here in our own midst. Imagine for a moment clusters of people, supporting each other as they go into the harvest field. That is what Jesus had in mind when he said, "Ask the Lord of the harvest, to send out workers into his harvest field." Oh, that we might see the compassion on the face of Jesus in our faces and that we might listen to the compassion in his voice as he asks us to pray. Jesus was not exaggerating when he said, "The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few." Amen