

## Seeing the Multitudes: Matthew 9:35-38

Franklin Church of Christ  
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PM Worship

### Introduction:

Have you ever been discouraged while serving the Lord? Have you ever just gotten tired of dealing with what the people in the world dish out to us, wanting to close them off and just let them be lost? Look at Jesus in **Matthew 9**. He was accused of blasphemy (**vs. 3**), of associating with the wrong people (**vs. 11**), of not being holy enough (**vs. 14**), of folly (**vs. 24**), and even of being in league with Satan (**vs. 34**). This must have been discouraging. However, **vs. 35** says Jesus continued teaching and saving these people. **Matthew 9:35-38** provides a marvelous word picture, showing Jesus' motivation. Look at this picture, answering three questions: 1) What did Jesus see? 2) What did Jesus feel? 3) What did Jesus do?

### Discussion:

#### I. What did Jesus see?

- A. "... the lonely, distressed, sick, poor common people ... suspicious Herodians, hypocritical Pharisees, wealthy Sadducees, monkish Essenes, greedy, grasping publicans, perhaps spies of Herod and informers of Pilate, prostitutes and other sinners ..." (Fowler, Harold, Bible Study Textbook Series, Matthew, Vol. 2, p 220). But this does not really answer our question.
- B. Jesus saw people who were like sheep without a shepherd (**vs. 36**).
  1. Unlike the sheep in **Psalms 23**, they had no one to lead them beside still waters. They had no one to restore their soul. They had no one to guide them. They had no one to protect and comfort them. They had no one to feed or prepare a table for them.
  2. Did they not have any shepherds? Certainly they did. They had an abundance of self-proclaimed shepherds: priests, scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees. However, these were thieves and robbers who had entered the fold to steal and kill (**John 10:8-10**). These men thought themselves shepherds, but Jesus said they traveled land and sea for one proselyte but made him twice as much the son of hell (**Matthew 23:15**).
- C. Because these people had no shepherd, they were distressed or harassed (**vs. 36**).
  1. The term for distressed in this text is rich in meaning. It primarily meant skinned, flayed, rent or mangled. This is a picture of sheep mangled because they had no one to protect them. Sheep who wander from the fold are in particular danger of distress. Wolves, lions, or bears may attack them. They may become caught in thorn bushes. They might be stolen by those who will only kill the sheep for their own ends. They may wander into ravines or mud beds from which they cannot escape.
  2. That is what these people were like. They were harassed, distressed, mangled. They were harassed by the daily troubles of sickness, finances, stress, etc. They had jobs that were at times a hardship. Some of them were lonely and discouraged. Some were poor and couldn't pay their bills. On and on the list goes. They were distressed by the false-teaching ravenous wolves of their day (**Matthew 7:15**). They were harassed by the oppressive weight of religious restraints made up by the scribes and Pharisees (**Matthew 23:4**).
- D. Because they had no shepherd, they were downcast or helpless (**vs. 36**).
  1. In the context of sheep without a shepherd, this term produced a particular picture in the minds of the early readers. It described a sheep gone astray and entangled in a thorn bush. The sheep would wrestle to free itself from the bush, but would only succeed in tangling itself up even more. The sheep would work harder and harder, but its situation would get worse and worse. Finally, the sheep, utterly exhausted, no longer able to stand, dropped to the ground. It had become downcast.
  2. This is what Jesus saw. People harassed by so many things, but the harder they worked to free themselves, the more entangled they had become. They worked and worked, but they could not solve their problems. Finally, out of utter exhaustion they gave up and were cast down. Of course, each individual was at different stages in this picture. Yet, each, without Christ, was working to this inevitable end.

#### II. What did Jesus feel?

- A. **Vs. 36** says Jesus felt compassion for these people. What exactly is this compassion?

1. In **Luke 7:13**, Jesus saw a widow from Nain in the funeral procession of her only son. Feeling compassion for this woman, who now had absolutely no means of support, Jesus raised her son from the dead. Compassion is the motivating force to help those in need.
  2. Compassion is undeserved. In **Matthew 18:27**, the parable on forgiveness, and in **Luke 15:20**, the parable of the prodigal son, we see this aspect of compassion. Neither the debtor nor the prodigal son deserved the compassion given them. If somebody deserves something from us, that is not compassion. It is duty.
- B. The normal reaction from man is to hold these sinners in contempt. In fact, earlier in **Matthew 9**, the Pharisees had been upset because Jesus was eating with sinners. Jesus responded, "Learn what this means, 'I desire compassion, and not sacrifice'" (**Matthew 9:13**). These men were so concerned about the lack of perfection among these sinners that they did not care about their lost souls. Therefore, they never bestowed any mercy or compassion to help them overcome their sins. But Jesus felt compassion. He saw a need in their lives and was willing to help provided that need, no matter how undeserving the people were.

### III. What did Jesus do?

- A. **Vs. 35** says Jesus taught the Gospel of the Kingdom.
1. Jesus was doing the very thing which would help these sheep out of the thorns. He was teaching them the good news of forgiveness in Him in the coming kingdom.
  2. Some might look to this passage claiming as part of Jesus' compassion he was also healing their illnesses. Therefore, the church today needs to be busy in social action. This passage is not making that point. Remember, Jesus' miracles were not for the purpose of healing. Jesus' miracles were so people would believe (**John 20:30-31**). His miracles were part of His compassionate teaching.
- B. **Vs. 37** says He encouraged others to pray for the people.
1. Jesus then worked to get others to see what He saw. Using the illustration of the harvest, he wanted his disciples to see a world so full of people who need shepherds that there are not enough shepherds. They must pray for more workers.
  2. Secondly, this is a way of encouraging the disciples to be workers. When one prays, he must be willing to offer himself as an answer to that prayer. Otherwise, he is like the man in **James 2:16** who told his unclothed and hungry brother, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled." But did nothing to help. Consider the man on the subway who, while seated, noticed a pregnant woman standing in front of him. He prayed that God would provide her a seat. After praying, he realized, he was sitting on the answer to his prayer.

### Conclusion:

I trust you realize that this lesson has not really been about what Jesus was and did. Rather, it is about what we ought to be and do. Although we come in contact with the multitudes every day, Satan is trying to convince us there is no harvest. He wants us to look at the sinners around us and become discouraged, giving up, letting them be lost. But the fact is, there is still more harvest than workers. Before we will glean from the harvest, doing what Jesus did, we must see what Jesus saw and feel what Jesus felt. What do you see when you face the multitudes? What do you feel? Do you see people you don't want to be around because they make you uncomfortable? If so, you won't reap the harvest. Do you see friends you don't want to make uncomfortable? If so, you won't reap the harvest. Do you see a pool of people from whom you simply hope to fill this building? If so, you won't reap the harvest. Do you see people distressed and downcast, as sheep without a shepherd? Only then will you have the compassion to reap the harvest. Only then will you introduce to them the one Shepherd who can take their burdens and untangle their lives, lifting them up and leading them to the refreshing places (**Psalms 23**). This week, as you encounter people that you have seen every day for years, look at them anew. See them as people needing the Shepherd that you know.