

Compassion & Power – Matthew 9:35-38

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Mt. St. Helens*

1. On May 18th, 1980, Mt. St. Helens in Washington State exploded with what's probably the most visible indication of the power of nature the modern world has ever seen.
2. At 8:32 AM the explosion ripped 1,300 feet off the top of the mountain, with a force of ten million tons of TNT, the equivalent of 500 Hiroshima A-bombs!
3. Sixty people were killed, most by a blast of 300+ degree heat traveling at 200 MPH. Some were killed as far as 16 miles away.
4. The blast was so powerful, it flattened 150 foot tall Douglas fir trees, 17 miles from the blast site.
5. It's estimated that the trees destroyed by the shock wave would produce some 3.2 billion board-foot of lumber – enough wood to build 200,000 three bedroom homes! → Now that's *power*!

B. *We Love Power*

1. Most people love hearing about such demonstrations of power.
2. Whether it's the power of nature seen in –
 - a. a volcanic explosion or the power of a hurricane or earthquake,
 - b. or whether it's a dramatic physical feat someone pulls off like –
 - 1) the Olympic weight-lifter who sets a new record
 - 2) or a world strongman competition in which the winner pulls an 18-wheeler for a quarter mile,
 - c. we love to hear such stories of *power*.
3. In fact, there seems to be an *innate human fascination* with power.
 - a. different people may be drawn to different forms or manifestations of it --
 - b. but in one way or another, everyone is drawn to power.
4. Some want more power in their computer, others in their vehicle.
 - a. some vie for a promotion at work because the new position possesses more power.
 - b. money means power; *information* is power, influence is power.
5. Think about how much advertising appeals to the desire for power.
 - a. just this week I saw these ads on TV:
 - 1) a woman beat a fearsome looking monster out of her house and back under the hood of her husband's car – capturing the idea of the power of the Mercedes AMG engine.
 - 2) a young boy named 'Jack' built a wooden vehicle in the shape of a Hummer H2 and instead of following the race course, plowed straight downhill to beat the other boys to the finish line.
 - 3) in another ad a ripped muscle-man stood in front of a BowFlex holding forth the promise that if you buy one of those machines, you too can become the perfect specimen of human strength & power.
 - b. and then there was the ad showing several guys in painter's pants and the power of attraction those pants gave them with a pretty but obviously not very bright young woman.
 - 1) but that ad made me wonder – who's shown with the real power there;
 - 2) the guys in their baggy pants,
 - 3) or the woman, because in their desire to attract her, they spent good, hard earned money on *really ugly clothes*?
 - 4) I'd say she was sitting firmly in the driver's seat of power on that one.
6. I could go on, but you get the idea and can probably think of dozen's more examples of man's innate attraction to and desire for power, *more* power.

C. *Today*

1. We're looking at *power* today – but not power as the world conceives it.
2. When the world thinks of power, it sees it as sheer ability to do;
 - a. it equates power with force
 - b. and sees power as the means of promoting self.
3. Today we're going to be taking a look at power in the hands of Jesus.
4. And we're in for some serious surprises because this One who was Power Incarnate used it in a way very different from what we've come to expect from man.

II. TEXT

A. V. 35

³⁵Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.

1. This is still the first year of Jesus' public ministry and He's centered His work in the region of Galilee in northern Israel.
 - a. this was a fertile, green, and verdant area which the Jewish historian Josephus tells us held some 200 villages & cities, each with a population of at least 15,000.
 - b. that means nearly 3 million people lived in Galilee.
2. And Jesus had now made His way to each of those villages and cities to proclaim His message of salvation.
3. At first, Jesus would have seemed to the people of Galilee not unlike any other of the traveling rabbis who were common at that time.
 - a. these itinerant teachers would gather a small group of disciples about them and would travel the countryside,
 - b. accepting invitations to speak in the synagogues, which were the Jewish equivalent of the local church.
4. But where Jesus differed dramatically from the other rabbis was in the authority with which He spoke and the many miracles and healings he performed.
 - a. other rabbis would endlessly quote one another, rarely if ever saying anything new or of their own initiative.
 - b. Jesus was often heard to say things like – “You have heard that it was said . . . but I say to you.”
 - c. at the end of the Sermon on the Mount in ch. 7 we read that the people were amazed that Jesus spoke with such obvious authority and power.
 - d. but even more, what really capped Jesus' difference from all the other rabbis were the miracles and healings He worked.
5. Matthew says here that as Jesus worked His way through Galilee, He healed every sickness & disease; every illness caused by some germ, and every affliction or condition that hindered the people from enjoying a normal, healthy life.
6. Not a single needy person who came to Jesus went away without His Divine touch and deliverance!
7. Let's review for a moment the *kinds* of healings Jesus did.
 - a. in the verses prior to this, Matthew gives us a list of 8 cases of healing Jesus performed.
 - b. we're told here that He healed *every* sickness & disease.
 - c. but Matthew highlights 8 of them so that we might catch the flavor of just *how* Jesus' power was manifested.
8. Before we review these 8 healings, let's first consider how sickness was understood at that time.
 - a. they didn't know about genetics or germs,
 - b. so the prevailing wisdom of the time believed that illness was divine judgment on sin.
 - c. the sick were thought to be suffering for some unrighteousness and their affliction was tied directly to whatever it was they'd done.

- 1) so, the blind had sinned with their eyes, the mute with their mouths.
 - 2) lepers had committed some gross sin of the flesh.
 - 3) the lame had gone somewhere they ought not have been; and so on.
9. Because illness was seen as the evidence of God's holy wrath, the Pharisees and scribes looked with contempt on the ill.
 - a. there was no compassion, no concern to alleviate suffering.
 - b. on the contrary, they saw it as their duty to add to the afflictions of the sick by kicking them to the curb of Jewish social & religious life.
 - c. the chronically ill were often banned from attending the synagogue.
 - d. and some, like lepers, were even barred from living with anyone other than their own kind.
 10. So it comes as a great shock to read Matthew's list of those Jesus healed.
 - a. look with me at ch. 8, and if you have a Bible with subheadings, you'll notice the first healing Matthew mentions in vs. 1-4 was a leper.
 - b. in vs. 5-13, it's the *servant* of a Roman (Gentile) CENTURION!!!
 - c. in vs. 14 & 15 – he heals, get this – a *mother-in-law*!!!!!!
 - d. next, in vs. 23-27, Matthew tells us how Jesus calmed a fierce storm, just to comfort the terrified disciples.
 - e. in vs. 28-34, two especially dangerous demon-possessed men were dramatically set free.
 - f. in ch. 9, vs. 1-8, a hopeless quadriplegic was healed.
 - g. in vs. 18-26, Matthew tells us about a young girl who was raised from the dead.
 - h. then in vs. 27-31, two blind men are given sight, and in vs. 32-34, another demon possessed mute is delivered and restored.
 11. We read these today and see them just as really cool stories of Jesus' power.
 - a. what we don't realize is that Matthew picked these specific examples because they were demonstrations, not just of Jesus' power,
 - b. but He showed that power to the very lowest, despised, rejected and avoided of Jewish society.
 - c. and that's why inserted right here in the middle of this list of 8 healings, Matthew includes his own call by Jesus to follow Him in vs. 9-13 of ch. 9.
 - d. Matthew was a hated & shunned tax-collector; a turn-coat traitor who was utterly despised by polite society.
 12. Matthew's point couldn't be more clear – Yes, Jesus' power was awesome.
 - a. He had power over the physical realm, demonstrated in His healing of illness and calming the storm.
 - b. and He had power over the spiritual realm, able to cast demons out of the most seriously bound – with nothing more than a simple word!
 - c. but all of that power was used in a humble and simple way to touch, heal, and deliver the poor, the lowest and most needy.
 13. Now look at v. 36 . . .

B. V. 36

³⁶But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.

1. As Jesus traveled from village to village, teaching and healing, more and more people began to gather in the crowd that followed Him.
2. And now it's grown to the place where there's a vast multitude dogging His steps.
3. In fact, not long after this, we read of Jesus miraculously feeding them with just a few loaves of bread & fish – and the count was 5,000!
4. How many there were at this point isn't said but it could easily be in the many hundreds, even a couple thousand.
5. As Jesus looks out over them, Matthew says He was *moved with compassion*.
 - a. there are 3 different Greek words used for this emotion in the NT, and this one is by far the

- strongest.
- b. the other two words refer to *sympathy* and a mild sadness in the face of someone else's trouble.
 - c. but this word refers to the actual physical organs being affected; this was **a gut-wrenching sorrow** Jesus felt when He saw the crowds.
 - d. you know how you feel when you've just observed some scene of abject poverty or watched helplessly while some tragedy unfolds before you?
 - e. do you remember how you felt when you turned on the tube and watched with horror as the jet flew into the second tower of the World Trade Center and then watched as the towers collapsed?
6. These are emotions that you literally feel in the pit of your stomach.
 7. And that's what's being described here.
 8. When Jesus looked out over that crowd that had gathered around, He felt a physical sensation of pity and sympathy for them.
 9. And the reason He was moved so deeply was because He could see beyond the physical into the spiritual, and was able to observe the desperate spiritual poverty and need of the people.
 10. The tragedy that lay before him was every bit as sad and terrible as the collapse of the WTC on 9/11.
 11. What Jesus saw was a mass of people very much like a flock of sheep that had no shepherd.
 - a. Matthew says that to Jesus they appeared weary & scattered.
 - b. and again he uses **desperate** words.
 - c. 'weary' means flayed, cut, wounded.
 - d. 'scattered' is literally, lying about like dead corpses.
 - e. to Jesus, the multitude looked like a flock of sheep that had been ravaged by ravenous wolves who'd torn through the flock, biting, slashing, and maiming their way till the entire flock was wounded and lying scattered on the ground.
 - f. and all because the flock had no shepherd!
 12. You see, sheep are helpless and depend on the shepherd, not just for their health and well-being, but for their very survival!!!
 13. The fate of a sheep rests with its shepherd.
 14. And as Jesus looked at the crowds who were coming to Him, He could see they had not been well-served by their leaders, the religious and political shepherds of the nation.
 15. Instead of serving the people, the leaders had **used** them, and made the people to serve **them**!!
 - a. the **political** leaders had conspired with the Romans so that the common people were being taxed to death and the nation had been turned into a virtual police state.
 - b. the **religious** leaders had turned the law of Moses into an elaborate set of regulations that squeezed all joy out of the worship of God.
 - 1) Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and scribes, saying that –
 - 2) "they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay **them** on men's shoulders; but they **themselves** will not move them with one of their fingers."
 16. These people had no joy, no hope, no prospect for a better future.
 17. Every where they looked they saw corruption and trouble.
 18. They knew the political leaders were interested in only one thing, and that was staying in power, and that they would do anything, at the common man's expense, to maintain & increase their power.
 19. Any solace they might seek in the worship of God had been taken from them by the Pharisees and scribes who'd told them access to God had closed like a massive bronze gate clanging in their faces.
 20. The only way to God was by climbing over that gate with a rope ladder of good works.
 21. But Jesus came to the common man with a fresh revelation of God and the life He wants for His people.
 - a. Jesus blew the dust off the long neglected truth of God's Word and reminded the people of

- the Lord's gracious invitation to be His covenant people;
- b. God wasn't just the great Creator – He was their Heavenly Father,
 - c. He cared about such things as their daily bread and daily struggles.
 - d. He was not some far-off angry deity Who had to be softened up and appeased with massive good works and careful observance of religious rites.
 - e. He loved them and yearned for them to simply turn to Him in sincere repentance.
 - f. then Jesus proved the message He preached by healing the very most hopeless and desperate of society.
 - g. and the people began to get the point;
 - h. if God would show such tender mercy, concern, and power to those who were on the fringes, the most desperate of all, then how great indeed was His love and care for all of them?

C. Vs. 37-38

³⁷Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly *is* plentiful, but the laborers *are* few. ³⁸Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."

1. We must not separate what we read here from the verse before it.
2. Jesus spoke this with all the emotion He was feeling at that moment.
3. These words were compelled by the ripping compassion Jesus felt as He looked over the multitude.
4. Can you see Him standing there, probably on a hillside, overlooking the crowds as they slowly plodded their way to where He and the disciples were?
 - a. it's been many days, months even of the same thing.
 - b. they've been traveling from village to town to city, and Jesus has been teaching the same message where ever they go.
 - c. there've seen, not just dozens of healings, but thousands and thousands.
 - d. but no matter how many are healed, more come; it's a never ending mass of human need.
5. As Jesus looks out over their heads marching in long lines to where He is, He sees beyond just these thousands who are coming, to the long line of history past & future;
 - a. this handful of poor neglected people are just the shadow of the billions who have been and will be →
 - b. born into a world cursed by sin and subject to corruption and death.
 - c. and all of that sad reality against the backdrop of humanity's potential and God's original plan for mankind's dominion & glory.
6. But Jesus knows that as He stands there, with His coming to Earth, a crucial moment has arrived, and what had been lost in the Fall was now going to be reclaimed.
7. If history was like the passing of the seasons, then with His arrival at that moment, the season of harvest had begun.
8. The sickle that would reap the harvest was His message, the Gospel.
9. The power that would swing the sickle was the power of the Holy Spirit.
10. There was only one need – workers, laborers; people who would go forth in the power of the Spirit, proclaiming the message of the Gospel.
11. So Jesus said to the disciples – "The time of harvest has come and it is abundant. But there aren't enough workers – we need more!"
 - a. "Pray! Pray for more workers."
 - b. "Ask the Lord to whom the harvest belongs, that He would send out more workers into the fields."
 - c. now, Jesus used an interesting word here when we read "send."
 - 1) the word is another strong and provocative one.
 - 2) it means to throw or cast out.
 - d. there's a sense of urgency and priority in what Jesus is saying here,

- e. and it was something the disciples would easily understand for this was an agricultural society and well acquainted with the urgency of gathering the harvest when it was ripe.
 - f. when the harvest is ready, all other activity is suspended, and every available hand is pressed into service to gather the grain, or pluck the fruit.
12. As Jesus looks out over that multitude, He sees that the season for spiritual harvest has come – and every available hand needs to be pressed into service.
 13. He calls the disciples to pray –to ask the Lord of the harvest to send out, to compel more and more workers into the fields to gather in the harvest before it’s too late.
 14. Really, what Jesus knows is crucial, is that the workers see what He sees!
 - a. workers will feel no need to harvest unless they can *see* it.
 - b. and that’s why in John 4:35 Jesus said to the disciples –

Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!

III. CONCLUSION

A. *Still The Season Of Harvest*

1. Though some 2,000 years have passed between what we’re reading here and today, we’re still in the season of harvest.
2. And just as Jesus told His followers to pray for more workers, so we, as His modern day disciples must do the same.
3. We must pray for more workers, because the harvest is still plentiful and urgent.
4. It’s urgent for two reasons –
 - a. first - because life is brief, and the person we meet today may not be here tomorrow.
 - b. second - the harvest is urgent because the Return of the Lord of the Harvest is at hand.
5. As we read on into the next verses in Matthew, we find that Jesus sent out the disciples to duplicate what He’d been doing.
6. He tells them to pray for more workers, then turns them into the answer to their prayers!
7. They went forth into the fields of Galilee with the sickle of the Gospel and the power of the Spirit and returned several days later with joyous reports of how God had used them to bring salvation and healing to thousands.

B. *Nothing’s Changed*

1. Friends – nothing has changed! We are still in the season of harvest. Our task is to reap that harvest.
2. Our tool is the still the gospel –the good news that God loves us and has provided the forgiveness of sins through the work of Jesus Christ.
3. Our power is the Holy Spirit, whose method and means haven’t changed for the passage of time – God still heals!
4. But there’s a problem – and it’s this; the modern Church seems to have lost its understanding of the proper use of power.
 - a. Jesus’ power was motivated by His tender love for the poor and needy.
 - b. the demonstration of His power was not for His own use or advancement.
 - c. in the temptation in the wilderness, He refused to prostitute the power of God to selfish ends.
 - d. no! His power was coupled with compassion for others.
 - e. His was a compassionate power.
5. But all too often today, the power of God is used for the promotion and advancement of some man, some minister.
 - a. it might be the power of words in his teaching & preaching ministry, but instead of directing people to Jesus, he works to promote his own little empire.
 - b. or it may be the power of the Spirit whether faked or real that’s used to gather a crowd, then bilk them out of their money.

6. Far too often, the blessing, anointing, and power of God becomes but a tool to gain worldly power & influence.
7. And shepherds, who should be servants, have made themselves masters.
8. And all the while, the flock of God is getting ravaged and ripped off.
9. You & I must begin where those first disciples began, by praying that the Lord of the harvest would send more workers into the harvest.
10. And realize – that means US!
11. It begins with praying for the vision Jesus had.
 - a. we must see people as Jesus sees them.
 - b. do I look at the lost and needy as the Pharisees did, or as Jesus did?
 - c. are people a bother, a bunch of wretches who have no clue and destined for a well-deserved hell? That’s what a Pharisee sees when he looks at people.
 - d. or do I see desperate, lost, needy people who are loved passionately by God and for whom Jesus was deeply moved with compassion?
 - e. do I see them as the very ones He died for and the Gospel was sent to?
 - f. even more, do I realize they are the ones I AM SENT TO?
 - g. I am a worker – the gospel is my sickle, the power of the Spirit my energy, and compassion my motivation!

C. *Don't Be Fooled*

1. Friend, don't be fooled.
2. Don't let yourself think that because the people of our time & place have nice cars and houses they are any less needy and desperate than the multitudes we find here in vs. 35-38.
3. People today are just as lost, just as needy, it's only that they have more things to hide their desperation behind; TV, theater, sports, hobbies, shopping, school, career, friends, lovers.
4. All these things are nothing but diversions they immerse themselves in so that they don't have to face the nagging emptiness of their souls, and the haunting question that there has to be more to life than this.
5. May God give us eyes to see as He sees – and fill us with compassion for the lost and needy.
6. And may there be a repentance from the mis-use of divine power that has marked the modern church, and a renewal of that power to its original purpose of showing those who feel unloved just how much the God of heaven loves & yearns for them.